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John Guare: In Search of America.

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JOHN GUARE: IN SEARCH OF AMERICA

A Dissertation

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in partial fulfillment of the
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Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of Theatre

by
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The frontier that we have been trying to escape, and which now must be faced, is *within*. There are limits to outer expansion, but no limits to improving the quality of life, the integrity of our character, the breadth of our knowledge, the sensitivity of our feelings, the capacity to find purpose in a life that is too quickly over (29).

Tom Hayden

ABSTRACT

This study examines the full scope of Guare's plays, from his Off-Off Broadway experimentation in the sixties through his 1992 play Four Baboons Adoring the Sun, and their place in America's cultural landscape. Set against the framework of modern cultural history, the investigation attempts to reveal Guare's vision of modern America's quest for fulfillment through the correlation of textual and stylistic analysis, critical response, and Guare's stated views. The study contends that Guare's portrayal of American desire unmasks the mass media's contamination of the American dream.

From the very inception of his dramatic imagination, Guare has mixed fantasy and reality in ways that reveal the particular confusion of modern Americans, a bewilderment enlarged by the lure of the American dream and its seductive depiction in the mass media. Guare's characters always seem to find that they have been sold a ridiculous bill of goods; the media encourage middle-class Americans to aspire to unattainable heights (and luxuries) which only seems to intensify desire and frustration. Nearly every play presents a scenario where the protagonists have miscalculated the potential of the American dream for providing story book success.

Chapter 1 addresses Guare's thematic and stylistic development as a young playwright during the sixties.

Chapter 2 focuses on the merger of the American dream and the mass media in two plays of the seventies, The House of Blue Leaves and Rich and Famous. Chapter 3 explores the disintegration of families and the seventies' "radical" focus on the individual (in Landscape of the Body and Bosoms and Neglect). Chapter 4 delineates the modern American national identity with a study of the futuristic Marco Polo Sings a Solo and a reassessment of America's idealism in the Lydie Breeze Tetralogy. In Chapter 5, an examination of Six Degrees of Separation and Four Baboons Adoring the Sun analyses recent modulations in the influence of the mass media on American society in the nineties. The epilogue discusses some of the artistic and social implications that follow from David Hampton's harassment of Guare over Six Degrees of Separation; it concludes with a brief status report on American culture in 1995.

INTRODUCTION: INTERMINGLING LIFE AND ART

From his early days as a light board operator for Gloria Swanson to his recent collaboration with Sir Peter Hall on the Lincoln Center Production of Four Baboons Adoring the Sun, playwright John Guare has been energetically and continually celebrating a life in the theatre. Indeed, Guare's personal history seems to reflect the intermingling of life and art so prevalent in his plays. Biographical events repeatedly appear in his work, and, ironically, these instances often relate to Guare's encounters with the theatre. For instance, the monologue which opens Act Two of The House of Blue Leaves candidly retells Guare's own experience as an eight year old boy, when Guare, hoping to land the role of Huckleberry Finn in an upcoming movie, performed an unwelcome audition for his uncle (who was the head of casting at MGM)(Cattaneo 74).

Yet Guare has never failed to make good dramatic use of his personal experiences. Ronnie, for instance, the character who delivers the Huck Finn monologue in The House of Blue Leaves, through the audition piece demonstrates his determination to kill the Pope and thus become famous. While the monologue may involve a true story from Guare's own life, Guare turns a somewhat embarrassing personal anecdote into powerful dramatic material (and motivation for the character's turn to terrorism and murder). As

Ronnie's recitation attests, the events of Guare's life, exaggerated and amplified in his work, confirm the reflexive yet enigmatic relationship between fact and fantasy so prevalent in Guare's style. Actress Stockard Channing, Oscar nominee for Best Actress, who performed Ouisa in the film version of Six Degrees of Separation, said of Guare, "He's a little sensitive that people say he exaggerates everything--all he does is cut out the boring parts and heighten the facts until it becomes fantastic" (Friend 329). As the keeper of an extensive journal, Guare has utilized any observation or memory that can illuminate the question that has dominated his career as a dramatist: how can one achieve a fulfilled life in an age dominated by the mass media (Cattaneo 97).

For Guare, the theatre proves the intersection where the world of fantasy ameliorates the frustrations and limitations of daily reality. Whereas another child might have contented himself with fantasy alone, Guare at the age of eight believed that fate had sent his uncle (who was on a national casting search for Huck Finn) for the expressed purpose of making the boy a movie star (Cattaneo 74). Like many of the characters in Guare's plays, Guare as a child dreamed a grandiose dream of fame and fortune, one that exceeded the realm of possibility, and consequently experienced disappointment when the dream did not prove real. Through his own experience of defeat, the youth

began to reflect upon the American ethos and its ability (or inability) to foster individual fulfillment.

From the very inception of his dramatic imagination, Guare has mixed fantasy and reality in ways that reveal the particular confusion of modern Americans, a bewilderment enlarged by the lure of the American dream and its seductive depiction in the mass media. For Guare, the differences between fantasy and reality have become increasingly indistinguishable since World War II, when the mass media began to dominate America's cultural life. Throughout his celebrated career, Guare returns time and again to the problems of identity and fulfillment in a media-saturated age.

Guare's characters always seem to find that they have been sold a ridiculous bill of goods; the media encourage middle-class Americans to aspire to unattainable heights (and luxuries) which only seems to intensify desire and frustration. Nearly every play presents a scenario where the protagonists have miscalculated the American dream's potential for providing happiness on a grand scale. Guare wants to know why Americans are dissatisfied and unfulfilled, why Americans have lost touch with reality and experience, and what the answer for tomorrow may be.

Throughout the scope of his career, individuals in Guare's plays pursue the American dream like obsessed lovers. One critic has described these characters as

"well-intentioned people who long for perfect gestures, for perfectly realized lives, but who can't function at all" (Friend 327). Guare leads his characters on extended journeys of self-exploration who at the end discover that the American dream has deserted them. Despite the setbacks of their life experiences, Guare's characters persist; they in effect declare: "Oh, that is the worst thing that happened to me, and I want to keep it alive, I don't want to become dead to the great emotional moments in life" (329). For Guare, human nobility lies in one's willingness to encounter reality, with all its disappointments. In modern America, however, the individual experiences a unique discomfort caused by the emphasis of American culture on expectation and the much touted possibility of achieving story-book success.

Like many of his characters, Guare has not been immune to the pressures of realizing the American dream. Indeed, the facts of Guare's life form a logical connection to the thematic concerns in Guare's plays. Born in New York City (the hub of the American theatre) in 1938 into a family with a strong connection to the performing world, Guare began writing plays at the age of eleven (75). Guare's precocious foray into playwriting not only presages Guare's life-long preoccupation with the theatre but also reveals Guare's early fascination with the written word, fame, and fortune. At this time, Guare and his companions produced

three of his "plays" in a garage with the hope that they would be discovered and featured in Life magazine (Cattaneo 76). His visions of stardom notwithstanding, Guare received the encouragement of his family, who presented him with a typewriter (which Guare still uses) on his twelfth birthday, and Guare has resolutely pursued the craft of playwriting ever since (76).

While attending Georgetown University, Guare continued his writing and became editor of the campus literary magazine. Guare graduated from Georgetown University in 1960 with a B. A. degree. During this time, Guare won the Washington One-Act Play Contest with his play The Toadstool, and received attention from the acclaimed author Katherine Anne Porter (Harrop 160 and Cattaneo 75). From 1960-1963, Guare pursued a Master of Fine Arts in Playwriting at the Yale School of Drama, where several of his new plays, including Something I'll Tell You Tuesday, were produced. A voracious reader since his early teens, Guare claims to have read every play in the Yale library; he also studied lighting, set design, and costuming (78). While at Yale, Guare also took a job as an usher for the Shubert organization and there benefited from seeing plays evolve during the production process (79). Looking back on his graduate experience, Guare remembers that his enthusiasm stemmed from his overwhelming desire to understand and master the creative process. Guare recounts

that he "needed to learn the light in which a play must live . . . [since] anything that happens on that stage is playwriting" (83).

When Guare graduated from Yale in 1963, his uncle did in fact offer him a job in the movie business--as a writer trainee with MGM (87). However, before Guare could get to Los Angeles, he was drafted and spent six months in the Air Force Reserve. As a result, the job at MGM was put on hold. At this time, importantly, Guare's aunt in San Francisco offered him a living legacy of ten thousand dollars, if he would return to New York and begin his playwriting career (87). Guare agreed to his aunt's generous proposal and arrived in Greenwich Village just as the new Off-Off Broadway movement began taking ascent (Harrop 160).

In 1965, Guare was tapped for charter membership in the Eugene O'Neill Playwrights' Conference along with Sam Shepard and Lanford Wilson. Over the next five years, he continued to develop his skills as a playwright and became an integral part of the New York theatre scene. With such plays as Muzeeka and Kissing Sweet, Guare, in the second half of the decade, won numerous awards and grants, and had several of his plays professionally produced Off-Broadway (Markus 330-332).

Nonetheless, Guare suffered a major setback in 1969 when Cop-Out quickly closed on Broadway. Perhaps the

failure of the play aggravated the singular sensibility of the playwright (who had once unabashedly performed for his uncle), for Guare responded in a highly emotional, yet creative, manner. After Cop-Out closed, Guare immediately left the United States. He attempted, in his words, "to escape the pain" and embarked upon the maiden voyage of the QEII's Arctic Circle cruise line (Cattaneo 91).[1]

To complicate matters, Guare was, at this point, also encountering difficulty completing The House of Blue Leaves, a play he had begun in 1965. Fortunately, upon his return, Guare recovered his creative energy through a serendipitous association with director Mel Shapiro, who helped Guare solve many of the theatrical problems in the play. Consequently, in 1971, The House of Blue Leaves became Guare's first major commercial success. This was followed in short order by Guare's Tony Award winning adaptation of Two Gentlemen of Verona for Joseph Papp (92). Guare's success firmly established him as one of America's most promising and prominent new playwrights. Over the decade of the seventies, as a frequent playwright in residence for the New York Shakespeare Festival, Guare wrote such plays as Marco Polo Sings a Solo, Rich and Famous, and Landscape of the Body. Guare became Adjunct Professor of Playwriting at Yale in 1978, and his play

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[1]Perhaps Guare's trip to the Arctic Circle inspired the creation of Marco Polo Sings a Solo.

Bosoms and Neglect was produced in both Chicago and New York in 1979 (Harrop 161). In 1981, Guare received an Oscar nomination for his screenplay of Louis Malle's film, Atlantic City (161).

In the early eighties, Guare wrote a series of plays about America's Civil War. The first two plays of the tetralogy, Lydie Breeze and Gardenia, were produced in New York in early 1982 but met with unfavorable critical response and closed after only four weeks of performances (Rose 120). The third offering of the trilogy Women and Water, was written in London in 1982 and has been only occasionally produced, with questionable success. The final play of the tetralogy, entitled Bullfinch's Mythology, has yet to be released (Harrop 161). In 1986, Guare received renewed public interest in his work with a Tony Award winning revival of The House of Blue Leaves (produced at the Lincoln Center). In 1989, Guare was elected to the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters. His most recent plays, Six Degrees of Separation and Four Baboons Adoring the Sun have kept Guare in the limelight. The success of Six Degrees of Separation purportedly made Guare a millionaire. Four Baboons Adoring the Sun, however, surprised the critics once again, who, with the notable exception of Frank Rich, failed to appreciate Guare's ability to forge new theatrical paths for himself. In 1992, Guare completed work on a

screenplay, which has yet to be produced, for Martin Scorcese based on the life George Gershwin (Cattaneo 71). Guare continues to live and work in Greenwich Village.

The aim of this study is to examine the full scope of Guare's plays, from his Off-Off Broadway experimentation in the sixties through his 1992 play Four Baboons Adoring the Sun, and their place in America's ever-changing cultural landscape. The study will endeavor to establish the contention that Guare believes that the answer to fulfillment lies in community, intimacy, family, and the acceptance of reality, not in media generated illusions. Set against the framework of modern cultural history, the investigation attempts to reveal Guare's vision of modern America's quest for fulfillment through the correlation of textual and stylistic analysis, critical response, and the playwright's stated views.

My interpretation of Guare's work is informed by twenty years of experience as a professional actor, director, singer, and playwright. I have seen numerous productions of The House of Blue Leaves and have viewed the film version of Six Degrees of Separation. I lived and worked as an actor, singer and director in New York from 1980-1983 and am well acquainted with the environment Guare describes in his plays.

Critical response to the plays has been gathered in an effort to elucidate and confirm thematic and stylistic

ideas noted in performance and to evaluate the plays' social resonance and public impact. Essays on popular culture, mass media, and social theory, and Guare's own stated remarks are utilized to corroborate my interpretation of Guare's theatrical critique of modern America's cultural mores (ideals configured by a too heavy reliance on the mass media). The study omits detailed discussion of Two Gentlemen of Verona and Atlantic City in order to focus on Guare's work written specifically for the medium of live theatre. My interpretation of the plays' performance dynamics and intended impact derives from a close reading of the scripts, personal experience seeing the plays, and critical descriptions and judgements. The study contends that Guare's insightful portrayal of American desire unmasks the mass media's contamination of the American dream.

The significance of the study originates from the lack of scholarly attention given Guare's work. With a career spanning some thirty years, Guare is considered one of America's most important recent dramatists. Despite a rise to prominence which began in the sixties, however, Guare has failed to attract the same academic notice as his Off-Off-Broadway contemporaries Sam Shepard and Lanford Wilson. Although there are numerous articles, reviews, and essays which discuss Guare's plays on an individual basis, there have been no full length studies that endeavor to

unify and correct a "somewhat distorted critical picture" of the playwright's unusual and diverse approach to playwriting (Wilmeth, Qtd. in American Playwrights Since 1945 150). In 1989, theatre scholar Don B. Wilmeth appraised the status of research on Guare and cited a need for a critical overview of Guare's complex canon of plays:

> Thematic studies of his [Guare's] plays are certainly needed, especially given the various threads that run through clusters of his texts, as is a more analytic application of the autobiographical touches found in much of his work (Qtd. in American Playwrights Since 1945 150).

Wilmeth's article in American Playwrights Since 1945 and Scholar John B. Harrop's "`Ibsen Translated by Lewis Carroll': The Theatre of John Guare" in New Theatre Quarterly contain excellent bibliographies on Guare. Biographical essays on Guare can be found in a variety of standard texts, like Contemporary Dramatists (1988) and The Encyclopedia of World Theater (1977). General studies on Guare are featured in The Strands Entwined: A New Direction in American Drama (1980) by Samuel J. Bernstein, "Camp, Cruelty, Colloquialism" by Ruby Cohn in Comic Relief: Humor in Contemporary American Literature (1978),and American Playwrights: A Critical Survey (1981) by Bonnie Marranca and Gautam Dasgupta. However, all of the above scholarly sources pre-date Guare's most recent work and, thereby, prove incomplete. Guare has consented to many interviews over the course of his career; Ann Cattaneo's 1992 interview with the playwright in The Paris Review

represents one of the more thorough and detailed sources of Guare's own thoughts. However, the bulk of criticism on Guare emanates from reviews of productions featured in newspapers and magazines.

Given the ever-increasing influence of the mass media, the heavy interchange between theatre, film and television, and current re-appraisals of social ideals (i. e. the American dream) in modern society, Guare's work may be more relevant today than at any time during his long and varied career. While lamenting a lack of a "sustained" level of clarity in Guare's plays, scholar Steven H. Gale, nonetheless, acknowledges the author's unique contributions to American theatre (and his unnerving and satirical insights into modern society's confusion and disorientation):

> The sense of the fantastic that characterizes Guare's vision of 20th-century America is epitomized in brilliant flashes of black humor matched among his contemporaries only by Kopit in the United States and Orton in England (Contemporary Dramatists 1988 ed., 220).

By examining the full range of the author's plays (from the sixties through the nineties), this study makes an attempt to define Guare's importance in American culture and reveal the methods and themes his work espouses.

Before moving into analysis of Guare's plays themselves, it is helpful to examine briefly the origins and mythology of the American dream. Insight into Guare's work is also expedited by an understanding of American

history since World War II. This material will enlighten the interplay of American ideology and the images of the American media, helping us to understand and clarify Guare's argument that the quest for fulfillment, in a media dominated society, too often leads to futility and isolation.

Typically, mythologies exaggerate stories from history in order to defend and explain a society's ideology, that is, to advance and nourish the society's "basic system of concepts, beliefs, and values" (Slotkin in Gunfighter Nation 5). Many of our most cherished American values derive from our Puritan heritage. The Old World Puritans who settled New England saw America as a New Eden or New Canaan, a land of escape, bounty, and limitless possibility. New World America came to stand, not only for freedom of religion, but also for the individual's chance to start life anew. America was a virgin land of seemingly limitless, undeveloped resources and infinite potential for progress (Porter 128). In short, the land offered an infinite vista of escape, release from the tyrannies of old world Europe.

Consequently, large numbers of fortune hunters and dissidents flocked to America. The potential for chaos and anarchy in the New World was great; yet the Puritans managed to achieve a "consensus ideology" that institutionalized, defined and controlled the emerging

American character (Bercovitch, "The Rites of Assent" 8-9). According to theorist Sacvan Bercovitch, the Puritans' profound sense of religious purpose informed the symbolic and mythical character of America, depicting it as a New Israel rightfully inhabited by God's new chosen people ("The Rites of Assent" 8-9). Bercovitch states that the Puritans were no different from other immigrant groups in their quest for land and material gain, except for the fact that they used God and religion to "effectively explain away their greed" ("The Rites of Assent" 8). For the Puritans, coming to America meant the fulfillment of Biblical prophecy. The expression of a manifest destiny, this belief system worked to exert control over an "unruly and volatile group of dissenters" ("The Rites of Assent" 9).

Just as the Israelites killed men, women, and children in their conquest of Canaan, the new American individual was licensed to pursue his dreams at all costs, but only in the name of the greater good. Thus, by linking the settlement of America to Biblical prophecy and imagery, the Puritans supplied New World Americans with a credo of individual self-reliance that simultaneously promoted the unbridled pursuit of material gain. For the Puritans, wealth and prosperity were signs of God's blessing. Conversely, and perhaps more importantly, the lack of wealth and personal achievement symbolized the fact that an

individual community member was outside the will of God. Thus, not only did the Puritan vision of New Eden supply America with a rhetoric and symbology of personal freedom; its ethic also created many of the more complex rituals of control and anxiety that could at once "encourage and confine" individual enterprise in America (Bercovitch, "The Rites of Assent" 11). From the country's very inception, the virtues of personal achievement were compromised. With the merger of private and public concerns, then, materialism became an intrinsic characteristic of the American identity.

The frontier of the North American continent also played a major role in shaping national mythology and the notion of the American dream. Frederick Jackson Turner's 1893 landmark address, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," which announced the closing of the American frontier, postulates that the West offered New World American individuals the unique opportunity for continual rebirth (Potter 142-3). According to scholar David M. Potter, Turner saw the frontier as a rich landscape which continuously molded the American character anew (146). Events, like the California Gold Rush of 1849, only increased the lure and influence of the frontier myth (Slotkin 18). Like the garden of Eden after the fall, the American frontier was a vast garden that needed to be reclaimed, tilled and cultivated. Only in America could

each turn of the shovel uncover a wealth of gold. Expansion and material gain thus became equated with happiness and freedom. The Puritan ethic and the frontier outlook conflated, providing the soil of germination for the present day American dream. Political theorist Richard Slotkin confirms this point when he writes that after only a few decades of "frequent retellings and deployments," augmented by the rise of newspapers through the 1850s, the Puritan ethic was "abstracted" into an American mythology (Gunfighter Nation 5, 18).

Indeed, one may argue that the emergence of the mass media in U. S. 20th century history has in part derived from the media's success in tapping this feature of the American outlook. Television and film produce "images" of success, freedom, renewal, fame, and fortune that well appeal to American culture's expansionist sensibility. Certainly, in the years immediately following World War II, there seemed to be no limit to America's authority, prestige and wealth. Social historian James Gilbert reports:

> From a society in 1940, in which farm animals generated more horsepower than airplanes, the United States swept into an era of abundance, power, and productivity . . . An endless bounty of goods . . . flowed into the homes of Americans, who purchased them with an apparently limitless supply of consumer credit (189).

As citizens of the richest and most powerful country on earth, individuals in the post-World War II U.S. seemingly

could have anything they wanted; the American dream could deliver upon its promises. Yet post-war prosperity in America exacted a paradoxical cost--the diminution of individuality. In short, the American individual during these years became the American "consumer."

Following World War II, corporations were the beneficiaries of the euphoric spending and abundance in post-war America. Corporate power grew exponentially as consolidations, mergers, and reorganizations placed the industrial might of America into fewer and fewer hands (Gilbert 187). Furthermore, the rapid expansion of communications technology (i.e., the mass media) assisted corporations in the process of centralizing their economic power and in selling their wares (185). Thus, America's economy began to focus primarily on corporations' need to create new markets rather than the interests of the American family or the individual *per se* (Hartshorne, 184). In other words, in post-World War II America, what was good for the corporation was good for the country.

Indeed, as early as 1950, social historian and author of The Lonely Crowd, David Riesman, observed a new phenomenon in America; that is, how the American individual began to seek guidance outside the family. Riesman noted:

> The peer group accepts a substantial responsibility in the flow of modern communications. It stands midway between the individuals of whom each group is composed and the messages which flow to the group's opinion leaders from the mass media. The mass media are the

> wholesalers; the peer groups, the retailers of the communications industry (The Lonely Crowd Qtd. in Brookeman, 110).

Describing what he termed "other-directed people," Riesman contended that for the mid-20th century American, the other, i.e., the peer group, had become "the source of direction for the individual" (The Lonely Crowd Qtd. in Wilkinson, 60-61). Self-understanding could be found in an expanding variety of social images and group constructs purveyed in TV, the tool of the corporation. Thus, the American individual, who for so long had personified freedom, growth, power, and achievement, seemed to disappear into the background of a mass consumer society (Brookeman, 111). Ironically, the media, now operating as "wholesalers" and representatives of corporate power, would use the message of the American dream and the technology of the newly invented television to sell the virtues of the American dream, which conveyed the satisfaction of home and family in terms of material consumption (and fantasy).

By the sixties, television had become the technological center-piece of the American home. Early in the medium's ascent to prominence, media authority Marshall McLuhan portrayed television as a potentially positive force in the expression of American "society's ideology and anxieties" (Understanding Media, Qtd. in Brookeman, 132). Indeed, McLuhan believed television could appeal to all five of man's senses and, thus, become the ultimate

expression of western culture (130-131). (Jean Baudrillard would later take the opposite opinion.) Yet McLuhan would have perhaps been disconcerted to see the characters in The House of Blue Leaves praying to and hugging the television-image of the Pope in their absurd attempt to enlist the pontiff in their search for fame and fortune.[2] Despite McLuhan's early fascination with the medium, television cast rank and file Americans in the roles of passive observers and targets of the corporate sell. Continually over-stating the merits and benefits of the American dream, TV also created unprecedented problems of perception in the public at large. If The House of Blue Leaves is any indication, then, the advent of television foretold the disintegration of American culture, not its zenith.

By the time Guare emerged to prominence in the mid-sixties, television had become the chief repository for the American dream in American society. Given Guare's own fascination with fame and fortune, it is not surprising, then, that the most conspicuous unifying element in Guare's plays is his satiric treatment of the mass media and its manipulation of reality, experience, and American desire. Over the years, Guare has unerringly and precisely depicted

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[2]Brookeman points out that McLuhan's work was subsidized by the American government, which perhaps cynically understood television's vast potential for molding public opinion (133).

modern America as a media-dominated society in frantic search of success. Paradoxically, much of the author's success has centered upon Guare's ability to utilize the very media techniques he satirizes in his plays. Guare has never been hesitant to employ any of an array of devices--flashbacks, music, pratfalls, song and dance, long monologues, camp, sight gags, asides, film and television techniques, and many more--in his plays to capture an appropriate picture of modern delusional society.

Examination of the author's reviews and notices reveals that Guare's work has often baffled critics. For instance, critic John Simon confessed being confounded by Guare's approach to playwriting when he bestowed his begrudging admiration on Six Degrees of Separation:

> There you have it: 35 degrees of manipulation, cunningly executed, seemingly seamlessly joined, interlarded with clever one-liners, alternating comic situations with mildly disturbing ones, drenched in social significance, sprinkled with poignancy. Six Degrees of Separation is a play about everything, with something in it for everyone, and with enough Cezannian empty patches into which you may project your own particular thing in the unlikely case that Guare overlooked it (58).

Many critics share Simon's somewhat hesitant confirmation of Guare's work. By some reviewers, Guare's plays have been deemed "implausible . . . slam bang hilarious . . . [yet] serious," while others see the author as "diffuse and self-indulgent," and not serious at all (Markus 331, Cohn, New American Dramatists 36-39).

Some critics seem to mistake Guare's forays into our "fatally shallow" media society as a weakness in his playwriting itself (Marranca and Dasgupta, American Playwrights 52). In their view, Guare's eclectic, media-informed stylistics represent a lack of coherent structure. Highlighting the often irregular nature of the playwright's approach, director Lloyd Rose asserts that Guare's plays are "part farce, part tragedy, part parody, part dream" ("A New American Master" 120). Guare is a "poet-vaudevillian" who is less poetic than Beckett but more fun-loving ("A New American Master" 120). Consequently, Guare's eclecticism leads him to write plays that somehow manage to combine successfully the elements of soap opera, Ibsenian poetic realism, musical revues, and the excesses of modern technology. Thus, for some critics, like Steven H. Gale, the resulting creations are "too outrageous" to be included in the mainstream canon of traditional theatre (219). While some scholars assert that all of Guare's plays have the "feel of show-biz material as crafted by a playwright reared on the fringes of commercial theatre," many critics concede that Guare's plays are "vitally theatrical" mirrors of a modern American society dominated by the mass media (Markus 331). Instead of being criticized, Guare ought to be praised for his deft ability to portray the murky disorientation of modern existence.

With his unique approach to playwriting, Guare offers contemporary American society penetrating insights into the world of the media and its relationship to the American dream. By having his characters sing and dance, wear costumes in public, re-enact B-movie scripts, perform in porno-films, and, chiefly, suffuse their lives with media fantasies, Guare investigates and redefines the modern American identity. Guare's plays ironically delineate how attempts to realize dreams through media-learned techniques infect Americans with isolation and loneliness. In a 1971 interview, Guare explains the roots and rhetoric of his dramatic strategy:

> Catholicism and show biz. So full of dreams and phoney promises. I started fusing them together in 'House of Blue Leaves' and when I did, I began to understand a little more about where I came from and why I am--peculiarly--the way I am (Bosworth D-2).

It is clear that Guare's work is preoccupied by the media and its failure to bring people together in American society. While Guare avoids the subject of Puritans *per se*, the author repeatedly takes the media to task for its manipulation of the American heritage; his plays illustrate a link between modern day confusion and the foundations of the American dream. In Muzeeka, a one-act play of the sixties set against the backdrop of the Vietnam "conflict," Guare's anti-hero, Jack Argue, strives to break away from his Puritan roots by searching for a non-existent, ancient "Etruscan" ancestry. Jack discovers, however, that "he is

so much a part of his own bourgeois background that he is doomed to live the lie of middle-class American life" (Harrop 163). Critic Gautam Dasgupta describes the play's final moments when Argue kills himself with a machete as "the ultimate disclosure of the lies in which America's myths are garbed" (45). Argue's fate suggests that Guare contends that the media and the American dream form a dangerous combination, one that adversely affects the central values in American culture--intimacy, connection, family, and individual achievement.

CHAPTER 1:

EXPERIMENTATION IN THE '60s: EXPLORING THE FORM OF THE ONE-ACT PLAY

Even as social and political dissent in America in the early '60s shattered the affluent complacency of the Eisenhower years, many critics maintained that the American theatre "continued to doze in the center of blandness and mediocrity, impervious to experiment, immune to achievement, hostile to thought" (Brustein, Seasons of Discontent 13). Critics lamented a "staleness" in American performance in the early sixties which suggested that nothing in the theatre had seemed to have changed in over thirty years (Kerr, "Theater is Victim," 11). In other words, many critics asserted that the theatre was giving few indications of the great fomentation occurring in almost every other aspect of American life. The established American theatre in the sixties not only lagged behind the times but seemed to be unwilling or unable to participate in the political debate that was transfiguring the American social landscape.[3]

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[3]In his article, "The Tragedy of American Theater," John Simon couched his complaint about the American theatre's lack of social relevance in economic terms: "Since the joys of acquisition and the comforts of success are such supreme and unchallenged middle-class values, the theater finds it easiest to pander to them shamelessly" (Simon, "Tragedy" 78). Brustein was even less charitable when he described the American audience in the sixties as "stupefied by affluence" (Seasons of Discontent 13).

English playwrights, like John Osborne and Harold Pinter, were over-shadowing the fading figures of American stalwarts like Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller, who seemed to be repeating themselves with oft-used techniques and thematics (McNamara 1).[4] In 1966, Time Magazine noted the preponderance of European absurdists like Beckett, Ionesco, and Genet on the American stage ("The Modern Theater" 34). The publication complained that "U.S. playwrights . . . have nothing to say about either humanity or the human predicament" ("The Modern Theater" 34). Theatre critic Walter Kerr added that the formerly revolutionary, "absurdist" themes of chaos and meaningless had been become clichés by the mid-sixties; Kerr wrote, "One only needed to know that the play was Absurdist to know in advance what song it would sing" ("Theater is Victim" 15). Not only were American voices silent, but apparently the message of the European Theatre of Revolt had been absorbed by New York's commercial theatre machine, made fashionable, and rendered impotent.

The artistic stagnancy of the traditional American theatre in the sixties, however, could not long withstand the pressure exerted by massive political unrest and dissent. New theatrical voices were about to emerge, and Guare was to become a vital participant in the

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[4]Camino Real signifies Williams' exceptional foray into a hitherto unexplored avant-garde style of playwriting.

non-commercial theatre's rise to prominence (as an active member of the Off-Off-Broadway movement). As early as 1968, only a few years after the Off-Off-Broadway phenomenon began, theatre scholar Robert Brustein listed Guare with Sam Shepard and Lanford Wilson as pivotal voices in the new "third theater" (The Third Theatre 37). Brustein proved to be prophetic, for the careers of Guare, Wilson, and Shepard have continued well beyond the Off-Off-Broadway's experimental context.

According to scholar R. J. Schroeder, the Off-Off-Broadway movement of the sixties represented an "anti-tradition and anti-Establishment revolution" which exchanged the long-established well-made play for "fantasy and intuition" (vii). Twenty-three year old Sam Shepard described the Off-Off-Broadway environment as a "carnival community that smack[ed] of anarchy" (Gussow, "Off-Off-Broadway" 88). For Shepard, the commercial theatre was "a big bust, so old-fashioned, so steeped in its tradition and its economics" (Qtd. in Gussow, "Off-Off-Broadway 90). The credo of the "third theater" implied that there were no rules or limitations on what could be written or produced in the name of theatre, as long as it was not commercially oriented or traditional in approach. As the following excerpt from R. J. Schroeder's introduction to Eight from the Underground testifies, many

critics characterized Off-Off-Broadway in terms of its differences from traditional theatre:

> The new underground theatre does not arouse pity or awe. It does not educate or inspire or uplift its audiences. It is neither noble nor rhetorical. It does not become a temple of the passions. It is not philosophically contemplative. It does not seek to beguile with poetic subtlety or grandeur of language. It is not larger than life. It does not aspire to aesthetic beauty in any traditional sense (x).

In other words, the Off-Off-Broadway movement sought to re-direct, re-define, and purify the theatre by dissociating itself from commercial production. As critic Mel Gussow asserts, the Off-Off-Broadway movement epitomized a clear alternative to the lack of artistic vision on Broadway ("Off-Off-Broadway" 88). It, moreover, resisted incorporation as farm system or breeding ground for future commercial endeavors (88).[5] One cannot underestimate the importance of Guare's arrival in New York at this time (1965), when the revolt against the "logic and good construction" of the traditional theatre was well underway (Hewes 48). Guare would develop his eclectic and unusual approach to playwriting by drawing on the wealth of innovative experimentation occurring in Greenwich Village.

Just a year or so before coming to New York, however, Guare had completed his M.A. at Yale with a production of his play, Did You Write My Name in the Snow?, a work that

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[5]Guare's work in the second half of the sixties, however, would culminate in the Broadway productions of Cop-Out and Home Fires.

reveals the optimism of a young playwright caught in the "Camelot" glow of the JFK era. John Badham, the play's director, would repeat lines from the play to write of Guare's hopefulness:

> If we are to learn one thing from this play it is that 'the world is not shabby or drab or filled with guilt, the world is beautiful and magic and filled with people who could meet because they knew all the words to all the songs' (Did You Write My Name in the Snow? 1).

Badham asserts that Did You Write My Name in the Snow? represents a "very personal statement of the playwright's personality . . . an outpouring which is full of love for man" (Did You Write My Name in the Snow 2).

Although Guare has continued to write in an autobiographical fashion over the years, one can surmise that the Kennedy assassination, which occurred just five months after the playwright's graduation, affected Guare in the same way that the murder darkened the hopes and dreams of many Americans. If so, it could be argued that the assassination altered Guare's perspective and encouraged the author to join the Off-Off-Broadway revolution. Indeed, by the end of the decade, Guare's "outpouring of love" found new expression through participation in almost every anti-war demonstration in New York and Washington and in Guare's politically vibrant one-act plays which frequently proclaim Guare's anti-war sentiments (Bosworth D-2).

From 1965-1970, a rapidly maturing Guare would (in a succession of one-act plays) begin to develop the theme that would dominate his artistic career--that is, the alienation resulting from a devotion to unattainable dreams in a media-dominated society. The seven one-act plays which comprise Guare's published work from the decade of the sixties include:

Something I'll Tell You Tuesday (1965 at Caffe Cino)
The Loveliest Afternoon of the Year (1965 at Caffe Cino)
Muzeeka (1967 at O'Neill & Provincetown)
Cop-Out (1968 at O'Neill & Broadway)
Home Fires (1969 on Broadway)
Kissing Sweet (1969 on New York Public Television)
A Day for Surprises (1970 at Caffe Cino)

The Off-Off-Broadway movement provided Guare with the opportunity to "get a play done and, no matter how it came out, return again" (Guare, Qtd. in Hewes 48). The author wrote plays for the Barr-Albee-Wilder Workshop and several as a contributing member of the Eugene O'Neill Memorial Theater Playwrights' Conference (Hewes 48). Since both groups offered Guare production dates before his scripts were completed, Guare characterized the process as ideal for the creative journey of self-exploration (Hewes 48). In other words, Guare could write what he chose to write without having to worry about the play's commercial value. Although Guare would later reject much of the looseness, anarchy, and politics of the Off-Off-Broadway movement, he worked within the fertile environment of the

Off-Off-Broadway movement in Greenwich Village to develop the skills, techniques, and themes which would define the playwright's vision and sensibility and thrust him into national prominence with the successful production of The House of Blue Leaves in 1971.

Ironically, the first act of The House of Blue Leaves was written in 1965 but was not completed until 1971 (Cattaneo 90). Guare relates that the death of his father and a lack of technical skill contributed to his frustration (Bosworth D-1; Cattaneo 92). In fact, Guare wrote nine different versions of the second act as he tried to complete the project (Hewes 48). Guare would later admit that the revolt against structure inherent in the Off-Off-Broadway movement made writing anything but short plays almost impossible. Guare remarked, "It was like living in too small a living room" (Qtd. in Hewes 48). If the successful completion of The House of Blue Leaves in 1971 represents the defining moment when Guare became a major American playwright, the one-act plays from the latter half of the sixties detail Guare's journey toward his artistic maturity.

Like almost all of Guare's subsequent work, the early plays confront, in varying degrees, issues of family and individual fulfillment in an American society obsessed with achievement (Harrop 150). According to the playwright, Americans falsely equate fulfillment with fame and fortune.

Guare's wife once remarked, "John is star struck . . . He thinks people wanting to be famous for fifteen minutes is the great engine of twentieth-century life" (Qtd. in Friend 329). Guare's plays seem to suggest that true fulfillment can be found only when people connect with each other, their families, their past, their national history, and reality. Although Guare's seven one-act plays of the last half of the sixties become progressively political, the writer never loses sight of the way American society affects individuals and the day-to-day realities of family life.

The purpose of this chapter is to examine Guare's one-act plays of the period in order to see how the methods and techniques, which would become the hallmarks of his writing, relate to issues of personal fulfillment and connectedness in American culture. For instance, plant and animal imagery in these works delineate both the human connection to and separation from nature and biology. The plays' use of signs, placards and frequent literary allusions moreover illustrate human dependence on language for communication. Show business imagery and performance techniques, like song and dance routines, demonstrate the degree to which the entertainment industry infiltrates the lives of middle-class Americans with dreams of stardom. Guare would refine his approach in later plays, but in these one-act plays we can discern the vivid and diverse

palette from which Guare would choose his playwriting colors.

Experimenters in the Off-Off-Broadway movement often cast tradition aside in favor of immediacy and spontaneity. Apprenticeships to the masters and "careful study of the past" were considered irrelevant (vii). Like the Dadaists during World War I, the experimental theatre of the sixties sought to "destroy and purge" the traditional theatre of its reliance on text, realism, and naturalistic techniques (Madden 58). This order of production reflected an attitude common to young people all over America, who were developing a growing disdain for American social and political institutions and an abiding suspicion of anyone over thirty. As Off-Off-Broadway director Jacques Levy would declare, "People 15 to 25 are not interested in the theater as we know it . . . They're totally turned off by it" (Qtd. in Gussow 89).

Despite the iconoclastic nature of much Off-Off-Broadway writing, at first glance, Guare's Something I'll Tell You Tuesday appears to offer a realistic domestic drama, that of a family facing the possible death of the aging matriarch. Guare, however, "undercuts the play's reality" by specifying that all the characters, young and old, are to be played by young actors, preferably by twelve year-olds and sixteen

year-olds (Dasgupta 43). In the playwright's notes that accompany the acting edition of the play, Guare explains that "The important thing to remember is that they [Agnes and Andrew] were Hildegarde and George forty years before" (4).

Theatre scholar Gautam Dasgupta contends that Guare wanted the play's message to "resound loud and clear without being hindered by the play's reality" (43). Yet while Dasgupta notes Guare's ironic choice of having young actors play much older characters, the critic fails to consider the reasons why Guare took such an unusual approach.[6] If Guare's play had been performed realistically (with full sets and with actors of the appropriate age), then Something I'll Tell You Tuesday perhaps would have seemed as outdated a play as the conventional works the Off-Off-Broadway movement protested against. Yet it appears that Guare could not bring himself to dismiss theatre's past out of hand.

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[6]The critic overlooks the performance technique and judges the play's content on a strictly realistic basis. Furthermore, Dasgupta did not attempt to place the play in any kind of social context. Dasgupta writes that Something I'll Tell You Tuesday is "Devoid of dramatic interest . . . a mere slice of life, an exercise in capturing the nuances and petty concerns of people whose lives have passed them by" (42). This invocation of the naturalistic term "slice of life" would perhaps be appropriate if the play had been written by Tennessee Williams and performed ten years earlier (or if Guare had omitted his casting specifications).

Critics tend to categorize Something I'll Tell You Tuesday as a poignant but insignificant first effort from a promising new playwright. However, Something I'll Tell You Tuesday demonstrates Guare's unique ability to pinpoint important issues of the day; it also shows that he would not subscribe to prevailing ideas and experimental style for its own sake. In somewhat traditional fashion, Guare argues in the play that the past cannot be ignored and that it offers young people a prophetic mirror of the future. In contrast to the improvisational nature of many Off-Off-Broadway plays of the time, Guare's first foray into the new movement utilizes a variety of techniques and states its argument in a rather well-crafted manner. In fact, almost as a caveat, Something I'll Tell You Tuesday perhaps has more to say to young people than to old people, and more to say to the experimental theatre than to the establishment.

Something I'll Tell You Tuesday, in essence, details a rite of passage. The play spans the brief period just before the elderly Agnes checks into the hospital because of an unspecified illness. As the play begins, Agnes and her husband, Andrew, await the arrival of their daughter, Hildegarde, and her husband, George, who are planning to drive the elders to the hospital. Agnes, however, would rather not wait for them to arrive. She wants Andrew to walk the few blocks to the hospital with her. Before

Andrew and Agnes can depart, however, Hildegarde and George burst onto the scene, obviously in the middle of an argument. The stage directions indicate that Hildegarde's hair is "askew" and that "George looks like he's on the brink of either murder or an ulcer" (6). From the moment they arrive until they leave for their car, Hildegarde and George dominate Something I'll Tell You Tuesday with their bickering. Hildegarde and George go so far as to try and make Andrew and Agnes take sides in the fight. Andrew and Agnes, however, will not be drawn into the fray. Rather, Agnes merely asks, "How are the children?" (8).[7]

However, within Something I'll Tell You Tuesday, it is not the contact between generations that is important; it is the contact between members of the same generation that Guare emphasizes. Hildegarde and George spend their time arguing, chafing, and avoiding intimacy. On the other hand, Andrew and Agnes, as representatives of the older and wiser set, want to make the most of their time by walking together to the hospital. When the two head out on their walk, Guare executes a subtle and surprising thematic

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[7]As Dasgupta correctly points out, the two couples stand in isolated "counterpoint" to each other (43). There are no heart-wrenching debates and no pleas for contact or intimacy. Unlike the works of Albee, Williams, or Miller, there is no rational working out of the problems, and no detailed psychological probing into the "sins of the father." Indeed, as perhaps further evidence of Guare's satiric ability, the brevity and episodic nature of Something I'll Tell You Tuesday seem remarkably similar to television drama.

shift, one that distinguishes Something I'll Tell You Tuesday from traditional renderings of domestic life.

Along the way to the hospital, Agnes and Andrew are arrested by a nosy neighbor, heavy traffic, and dirty words written on the sidewalk, impediments which evoke images of a lonely, hurried urban society. Nonetheless, Agnes realizes she is excited to be going out (even if it is to the hospital) and shares with her husband: "We haven't been out together like this in a very long while. This is like a date. I feel very young" (15). As the couple stop to have a cup of coffee at an imaginary sidewalk cafe, Agnes offers an ironic and surprising declaration of what it means to be old. Agnes wants to tell Hildegarde:

> She's lucky they still fight. That's the worst part of getting old, I decided . . . the one thing I always thought we'd have, you and me, is the fights . . . That's the worst part of getting old . . . You just don't have the energy to fight (16).

The couple then head on their way, and Something I'll Tell You Tuesday comes to an end.

Guare deftly maneuvers the story to a point where the audience might expect Agnes to chide Hildegarde and George for wasting their youth on squabbling. Guare, however, has Agnes take the opposite view--Agnes simply longs to be able to fight again. The surprise aspect of Agnes' pronouncement drives home the message of the play much more powerfully than if she had issued an impassioned plea for contact. Agnes only longs to have her youthful energy

restored. Agnes remembers, "Not even a hot bath or a cup of tea can make you feel as clean as when I'd finish yelling at you and you'd finish yelling at me" (16). In true Off-Off-Broadway fashion, Guare baffles his audience by giving them exactly what they did not expect. Guare leads the audience to believe that Agnes' walk to the hospital will be a journey of self-revelation, but in the end nothing changes. The piece promotes no statement upon human communication and contact save the perpetuation of avoidance and estrangement in its depiction of the two family generations.

Some critics point to Guare's use of pantomime and minimalist scenery as central to the innovation of Something I'll Tell You Tuesday. However, pantomime and other non-realistic techniques had been employed in much the same way by other twentieth century playwrights before Guare. Furthermore, Something I'll Tell You Tuesday was first performed at the Caffe Cino where scenery, props, and budget were of necessity kept to a minimum. On the contrary, the chief innovations in the Something I'll Tell You Tuesday lie in Guare's astute and cunning ability to take an almost hackneyed story and engineer a clever comment on the growing generation gap of the sixties (and the link between traditional forms and Off-Off-Broadway experimentation). Through the use of child actors and the subtle manipulation of a familiar story, Something I'll

Tell You Tuesday creates a scenario which invites the young to take stock of their own lives, to reflect upon their own attitudes and actions before they themselves become part of the dreaded "establishment" culture. Guare reminds his youthful peers that no matter how strong their romantic revolutionary impulse may be, the cycle of life will continue (and the avant garde will become absorbed by the mainstream).

The Loveliest Afternoon of the Year introduces a thematic notion central to Guare's writing, that modern American society suffers from an often crippling inability to discriminate between truth and fiction.[8] As in Something I'll Tell You Tuesday, Guare juxtaposes two worlds in The Loveliest Afternoon of the Year. In the former, two generations oppose one another. In The Loveliest Afternoon of the Year, Guare contrasts an ideal world, of Sundays in the park (where fantasy reigns), with the order of daily responsibility. Yet as Guare would regularly demonstrate in his later works (like Landscape of the Body), the urban environment frequently inhibits one's capacity for ascertaining the difference between reality and fantasy.

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[8]Something I'll Tell You Tuesday and The Loveliest Afternoon of the Year were first presented as a double bill on October 25, 1966, at the Caffe Cino in Greenwich Village.

In The Loveliest Afternoon of the Year, two strangers (both young) meet in a park and become lovers--but only on Sundays. The rest of the week, "He" and "She," as the characters are named, return to their normative, but unsatisfying lives. "She" reports: "He doesn't know where I live and I don't know where he lives. He has his life and I have mine" (23). But with no other friends than "He," "She" can either stay in the park and feed the pigeons or return to an empty apartment. "He," on the other hand, has to contend with blind dogs, ugly children, and a homely, jealous, and trigger-happy wife. Together on Sundays, however, the couple escape the heartache of their everyday realities and feel fulfilled in each other's company. At the play's conclusion, rather than give up the temporary joys of their fantasy-relation, "He" and "She" parade themselves in front of the jealous wife, who promptly shoots them dead.

Like many of the characters in Guare's one-acts, "He" and "She" are nameless people. "She" seems to come from nowhere, and, through the course of the play, nothing much about her past is revealed. All the audience knows is that "She" has been alone in the city for "eleven months of silence" and that she goes to the park to feed the pigeons "for want of anything better to do" (21-22). "He" lives in the city but seeks escape from the absurd torments of a

demented wife (who bends his subway tokens and shoots a rifle at his feet).

Guare utilizes the park in The Loveliest Afternoon of the Year as a playground for idealistic hopes and dreams. The two youths retreat to a haven of nature within the city in the hopes of finding relief from the ills of urban living. They seek in each other someone who can be the screen for their projected fantasies. For instance, "She" prefers to walk in silence and hold hands rather than have the moment spoiled by hearing any complaint. When "He" begins to tell the story of how his father fell into a calliope and was "scalded to death," "She" asks, "Please . . . let's just walk and sing" (25). By having the couple meet in this locale, Guare makes something of a superficial attack on urban alienation. However, a much darker problem for modern America can be discerned in the couple's desperate escapades in the park, one concerning the very blurring of reality and fantasy.

Despite the unreal nature of the couple's relationship, the young man's life outside the park exceeds the wildest limits of credibility and takes the audience to the brink of absurdity. The "funny stories" he tells the young girl could not possibly be true, yet the stories apparently originate in his real life. For instance, "He" tells "She" how his sister's arm was torn off by a polar bear in the zoo, how the arm grew back, and how his sister

had to be shipped to Alaska in a cage because she started growing white fur all over her body. At the end of the play, the young girl's dying words are, "Hey, you really do have a sister Lucy, don't you" (28). "She" realizes "He" has been telling the truth all along. The audience, however, knows that arms do not grow back and that people do not suddenly start growing bear fur. It seems that Guare purposefully confuses reality and fantasy in The Loveliest Afternoon of the Year to highlight the disorientation, dissatisfaction and disillusionment borne of modern society's general inability to come to terms with the grim facts of life in urban America.

Edward Albee's The Zoo Story invokes the same desperate theme of urban loneliness, but Albee takes a different approach to the problem than does Guare in The Loveliest Afternoon of the Year. Although both plays portray an absurd, strange, and cruel society, Albee's dramatic order maintains a consistency that Guare's world does not exhibit. In The Zoo Story, "society" has failed Jerry. Guare's characters, however, have nothing so obvious to blame for their emptiness. Where Jerry bravely and articulately explains his suicidal plight, "He" and "She" barely make sense of each passing moment. At the end, however, "He" and "She" come to the same deadly conclusion as Albee's anti-hero. When "He" warns "She" that his wife might become homicidal if she saw them, "She"

responds: "And would that be any worse than you leaving me, me leaving you, you going back to her, me going back to my empty apartment?" (27-28).

In The Loveliest Afternoon of the Year, reality and society disappear into a fog of desperate fantasies. In a 1992 interview, Guare remarked upon the obscure order of the piece and commented:

> I'm still dealing with the issues in that play--identity, faith, the desperation it takes people to get through their lives, the lunatic order we try to put on the chaos of life and, technically, how to get the play out of the kitchen sink and hurl it into the Niagara Falls of life (Cattaneo 103).

We see that by modifying a realistic approach in The Loveliest Afternoon of the Year, Guare has raised many questions about our modern perceptions of truth and reality (i.e, the "lunatic order") that people use to impose structure upon their lives. Whatever Guare's specific intent may have been in The Loveliest Afternoon of the Year, the play in an entertaining and compelling fashion portrays the difficulty of making contact in the strange, confusing world of modern, urban America.

In his next play, Muzeeka, Guare begins to crowd his work with many more of the theatrical techniques common to the Off-Off-Broadway movement. He juxtaposes and jumbles a variety of styles and techniques ranging from primitivistic ritual, Brechtian devices, vaudevillian gags, pantomime, and circus tricks, to send-ups of films and television shows; such ploys serve to convey the sensibility of the

sixties' American landscape (Madden 57-59).[9] The wide variety of stylistic devices in the play mirrors society's complexity and, thus, invites questioning of contemporary society's contact and connection with reality.

Like the couple in The Loveliest Afternoon of the Year, Jack Argue, in Muzeeka, abandons his family and the conventions of daily life in an effort to give his existence meaning. Foreshadowing Guare's use of archaeology in Four Baboons Adoring the Sun, Argue seeks to find his destiny (which he hopes will justify his life) in a fictional history. Argue, thus, creates a mythological fantasy and embraces the Etruscan past (Muzeeka 17). As a corporate bigwig for the Muzeeka corporation, the "biggest largest piped-in music company in whole wide world," Argue believes that he can free the Etruscan in everyone's brain and, thereby, rescue himself and the entire nation from its comatose existence (Muzeeka 17, 7).

Thematically, "Muzak" provides Guare with the obvious yet perfect metaphor for the banality of middle-class life in the sixties. Argue wants to compose a new kind of music, a mixture of "rock and roll and Mozart" that will replace Muzak and reawaken the sleeping American spirit (8). In his mind, people will then flood the streets in

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[9]As Guare's first play with distinct political overtones, Muzeeka "established Guare as a playwright of 'exceptional promise,'" on the New York scene (Bosworth D-12).

happy dancing and celebration. His exalted dream, of course, never materializes and Argue is forced to confront his failure. Only his desperation exceeds his grandiosity, and rather than return from Vietnam to rejoin America, the land of the bland, Argue commits suicide.

The year 1968 was a tumultuous one for the United States. Lyndon Johnson withdrew from the race for the presidency in March; Martin Luther King was assassinated on April 5. At the end of April, students at Columbia University had taken over and occupied five buildings on the campus. A Columbia University professor responded with the warning that "we are at a crisis point in the history of American education and probably in that of the western world" (Gustaitis 35). When Muzeeka opened in New York in April 1968 (on a double bill with Shepard's Red Cross), Guare was already heavily involved in anti-war demonstrations (Bosworth D-12). Thus, Muzeeka represents one of the first examples of how Guare's personal experiences often inform his plays. Guare later acknowledged:

> I wrote Muzeeka for all those undergraduates I saw around me, so free and happy but wondering what in adult life would allow them to keep their spirit and freedom. How do we keep ideals in this particular society? Vietnam was starting to become a spectre that wouldn't go away (Cattaneo 91).

Given Guare's autobiographical bent, the optimism expressed just a few years earlier in Did You Write My Name in the Snow?, the fact that Argue and Guare were about the same

age, that "Argue" is an anagram for Guare, and that the word "argue" denotes opposition and dispute, Muzeeka may represent Guare's personal "argument" against the Vietnam war (Harrop 163).

However, rather than simply attack the war in Muzeeka, Guare uses a "comic fierceness that is admirable" to indict the so-called "silent majority" of the affluent American middle-class who gave approval to the war (Simon, Rev. of Muzeeka 384). Perhaps Guare's latent optimism informed Argue's belief that if the sleeping, dull-eyed populace could be roused to consciousness, then the middle-class would see the error of their ways and join the dance of protest against the war. Ironically, and somewhat prophetically, Argue's call for dancing and celebration would actually find realization in 1969 at Woodstock, while the "silent majority" looked on in amazement at 500,000 "misguided" American youth (Gustaitis 36).

Indeed, much of the new experimentation in the Off-Off-Broadway movement sought to merge art and life into some sort of "authentic experience" that might "make them indistinguishable" (Madden 54). The Living Theatre, founded by Julian Beck and Judith Malina, and the Open Theatre, founded by Joseph Chaikin and Peter Feldman, emphasized well-planned but improvisational performance techniques that relegated text to a minor role and advocated direct confrontation with audience members

(McNamara 3). Inspired by "Happenings," many groups abandoned conventional theatre spaces for the "open" environments of street corners, warehouses, and city parks, where audience and performers could mingle and fuse into non-traditional group formations (4).

Rejecting theatre as a mirror to life, Guare and the Off-Off-Broadway movement sought to reveal the ways life reflected theatre. For instance, writing about the theatre of ritual, critic Paul Velde observed:

> It is real life society itself whose reality is suspect, a sort of wholesale lie that requires elaborate justification and consolation prizes at every turn . . . Not only is the split between experience and behavior acknowledged, but the script is xeroxed and most of us don't even get a speaking part ("Theatre of Ritual" 256).

Through Argue's desperation in Muzeeka, Guare endorses this view of modern society. Confirming Herbert Blau's assertion that "the illusion of reality has been replaced by the reality of illusion," (College English, Qtd. in Sheehan 561), Argue, the archetypal sixties' American male, plays a variety of empty roles on his ritualistic journey of self-discovery. His performances, however, lead only to suicide. Through Argue's attempts to break free of society's bonds, Muzeeka encapsulates the frustration (and cynicism) of the Off-Off-Broadway revolution and comments upon America's inability to come to terms with the new sensibilities of a war-torn society.

Muzeeka's six episodic scenes represent Argue's chaotic quest for his elusive Etruscan birthright (and present several themes that will run throughout Guare's future plays). Unlike Something I'll Tell You Tuesday and The Loveliest Afternoon of the Year, Muzeeka immediately abandons any pretense of realism. Perhaps as a reference to the many signs and placards used in social protest of the sixties, Guare has each scene begin with the stagehands carrying a banner across the stage.[10] In Brechtian manner, the banner presents the title of the scene.

In Scene One, Argue sings the words written on the American penny while sitting (in his underwear) on the lower portion of a double bunk bed, the piece's only scenery. Beginning a play with a man singing the words printed on a penny (just after a banner has announced the ensuing activity) sends a message to the audience to be ready for anything. Critic and theatre scholar Gerald Weales submits that visual techniques in traditional theatre formerly had served to enrich the text (The Jumping Off Place 286). In the new Off-Off-Broadway theatre, however, visual imagery promoted a sort of anti-rationalism. In Muzeeka, Guare adopted this new approach, one that worked against layered textual meanings in favor of a hoped-for spontaneity (Weales, The Jumping

[10]Throughout the play, the stagehands execute sound effects, pretend to be furniture, sing and dance, and assist the actors with numerous props and stage business.

Off Place 286). Thus, in the surprising (and irrational) comic image of a man singing a "hymn to a penny" in his underwear, Guare depicts Argue as a middle-class American whose faith in the American dream has not led to fame and fortune but to the brink of insanity.

In the second scene, the playwright employs a series of visual vignettes to portray Argue and his wife in the aftermath of love-making. Retreating to a copy of Playboy magazine, Argue ignores his wife "desperate" plea of "I love you" (Muzeeka 5). Cleverly, the playwright suggests the unhappiness and lack of intimacy in Argue's marriage without having to engage the machinery of the well-made play. Guare simply presents a visual snapshot of the couple's inability to meet each other's needs.[11]

In Scene Three, Argue "delightfully rhapsodizes" (for two or three pages of text), about his dream of being an Etruscan (Oliver, Rev. of Muzeeka 92). All the while, like the eye atop the pyramid on the back of a dollar bill, Argue's wife watches him with just one eye from beneath the sheets (Muzeeka 6).[12] Unlike Artie or Bing, Argue does not want to be an American-media big shot, "a Kennedy or a Frank Sinatra" (Muzeeka 6). If he could just be an

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[11]Perhaps Guare stresses the couple's alienation and downplays rational explanations in homage to the absurdists.

[12]Guare seems to be somewhat ahead of other playwrights in zoning the female body as this reversal of the Lacanian gaze in Muzeeka suggests.

Etruscan, he could find the contentment he cannot find in his marriage. Yet all Argue knows about the Etruscans is what he sees on ancient "jugs," the only remnants of Etruscan civilization. Intrigued by what Argue calls a "whole civilization dancing," he wants to wear the same "lovely, looney" smile the Etruscans possessed so he can "know the joy that's painted on those pots and bottles and urns" (60). Argue can find no satisfaction in his own time, so he creates his own tilted mythology. He looks at the pictures on the ancient pottery and lets his imagination do the rest.

What results is a grandiose plan to save America by freeing "the Etruscans in all our brains" (7). Responding to an urgent need within himself to allay society's expansive paralysis, Argue wants America to experience an orgiastic, libidinous explosion of celebratory dancing.[13] In his vision, Argue sees the disappearance of all pretense and decorum as

> Buses gallop down Fifth Avenue crammed with naked people beeping the horn, riding on the sidewalk, looting all the stores, making love in all the

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[13]In The Greening of America, Charles E. Reich expresses optimism (similar to Argue's) about being able to affect change in a coming social "revolution." Reich defined the "American crisis" as an "inability to act" but heralded the imminent arrival of new social "consciousness" that would outfit Americans for fuller and richer living in rapidly changing and confusing world. Since Reich dedicates The Greening of America to the students at Yale, one could wonder if Reich had any influence on Guare or vice versa.

> churches, knocking noses off plaster saints, and never getting out of the bus (8).

Argue continues his search for contact even while his wife goes into labor at the hospital; rather than comfort his wife, Argue abandons his familial duties and visits a an exotic prostitute instead. While having sex, Argue begs Evelyn (the whore he has engaged): "Cut off all the ties just for a while, so I can get back to what I was, am, am down deep" (13). Evelyn angrily responds: "Boy, are you a sickie" (13). Gestalt psychologist Fritz Perls might say that Argue's pursuit of the "ideal" created "Jekyll and Hyde" opposites within the character. In psychological terms, Argue's Etruscan ideal would be "only a beautiful mirage, but incapable to provide the real camel with the real water for the real march through the real desert" (Ego, Hunger, and Aggression 271-272).[14]

Evelyn reiterates her condemnation of Argue by repeatedly calling him a "phoney" (15). Argue pleads for support from the audience, "I've got friends here . . . You know me. I'm no phoney. I'm one of you. I've read

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[14]Critic Edith Oliver, however, failed to appreciate the scene's ironic juxtaposition. Oliver wrote that the scene with the whore failed because it was full of self-indulgent "esoteric nonsense" (92). On the contrary, Argue's hopeless idealism had given rise to unseemly acting out of harmful behavior. Guare adroitly uses the scene with Evelyn to show just how desperately polarized and out-of-touch Argue is. The scene may be dominated by "esoteric nonsense," but not Guare. Oliver mistakes Guare's intent as a weakness in playwriting.

Catcher in the Rye. I know what phoneys are" (15). Evelyn then proceeds to implicate the audience as co-conspirators by running into the house handing out business cards advertising her sexual specialty, the "Chinese Basket Job" (15-16). The stage directions call for the house lights to come up full, thus, denying the audience the privilege of hiding in the dark (16). Evelyn exits at the back of the house as the lights dim once more. The emptiness and embarrassment of the experience leave Argue speechless (and Scene Five simply depicts Argue at a loss for words).[15]

Scene Six takes Argue to Vietnam, where American television networks compete to sign soldiers to exclusive fighting contracts. Argue and #2 have to keep the volume low on the television in their tents, because, apparently, the Viet Cong covet the reruns of American shows sent over by the networks. #2 says, "My old unit wasn't wiped out 'til the end of Batman and the Ed Sullivan Show" (18). Now #2 worries about joining Argue's outfit because he might get into trouble with NBC. As the two prepare for bed, they get out their make-up kits and put on their make-up

[15]Guare will use Catcher in the Rye most effectively as the thematic center of Six Degrees of Separation. Furthermore, Argue's despairing retreats into fantasy because of an unacceptable reality foretell the gullibility of Ouisa and Flan in Six Degrees of Separation. Argue, Flan, Ouisa and many other Guare characters suffer from the same affliction of "phoniness" that results from a deep-seated dissatisfaction with reality.

for the next day's battle ahead of time, so they can get a little extra sleep in the morning. Guare's attack on television in Muzeeka differs somewhat from his later assaults on the mass media. In his later work, the mass media primarily embodies the empty promises of fame and fortune. In Muzeeka, however, Guare predominately focuses his criticism of the mass media on the commercialization of violence.

Vietnam was the first war brought into American living rooms by television, and the impact of the violent images on society could not be ignored.[16] Supporters of the war objected to television coverage because the reports seemed invariably to paint a negative picture of American G.I.'s and the war effort in general. Indeed, television has since often been blamed for undermining the war effort and contributing to America's defeat. As an active protester,

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[16]The playwright, however, may have under-estimated the revulsion Americans experienced watching the war, night in and night out, on the evening news. Rather than convince soldiers they "didn't do anything wrong," Americans projected their collective guilt onto the soldiers. Consequently, as historian Peter N. Carrol reports, returning Vietnam veterans often became social outcasts (It Seemed Like Nothing Happened 314). One Vietnam veteran described the dilemma as a "burden of silence . . . you learned to repress it, keep it secret, shut up about it, because people either considered you a sucker or some kind of psychopath who killed women and children" (Muller Qtd. in Carroll, It Seemed Like Nothing Happened 314). Amazingly, Carroll submits that, as a result of society's rejection, the "most decorated" Vietnam veteran, Dave Christian, came to believe that what he accomplished as an American soldier was "worthless" (314). Rather than accept responsibility for the war, the American "silent majority" shunned and avoided its former heroes.

Guare would seem to advocate television's intrusive and revealing power. In Muzeeka, however, the author seems to be suggesting that television coverage may have inured Americans against the horror, violence and reality of war. In the midst of Argue's homecoming fantasy, Argue confides to the audience:

> And I'll go back and be convinced, the Reader's Digest will convince me, reassure me, and the newspapers and TV Guide and my Muzeeka will stick their hands in my ears and massage my brain and convince me I didn't do anything wrong. And life will be so nice. And my wounds will heal and there won't even be, you won't even see, one little scar, one little belly button, one little memento to show that in violence I was re-born (21).

For Argue, killing provides the experience necessary for breaking "through the clay pot that covers [his] brain" into some sort of verifiable reality (18). Violence, however, has destroyed his heart and his capacity to feel emotion. In short, war has made the dance of the Etruscans impossible. Unwilling to face the return to America and the prospect of cesspool cleaning with #2, Argue stabs himself with a machete. Since he fails to discover the secret joy of the Etruscans, Argue chooses to retreat "back into the sea. Poof. Vanish. Splash" (24). Guare seems to assert that if violence is the only substitute for joyous dancing, then death provides the only acceptable alternative for Argue's unattainable "peace of exhaustion."

The sixties represented a decade of polarization, of unprecedented failures and triumphs in almost every arena

of American life. America could neither win the war in Vietnam nor come to any consensus of opinion about how to end it; the race to the moon, however, proved both a triumph of "Yankee ingenuity" and American unity. While political leaders fell prey to assassins' bullets in alarming numbers, the Civil Rights movement continued to prosper in spite of deeply entrenched resistance in the South. Americans found audacious political and social comment in films like Dr. Strangelove, The Graduate, and Bob and Carol and Ted and Alice. Television, on the other hand, gave America rube humor in abundance in shows like "The Beverly Hillbillies," "Green Acres," and "The Andy Griffith Show." Moreover, the invincibility of America's technological prowess was depicted in shows such as "The Man from U.N.C.L.E." and "Mission Impossible." On the fashion front, mini-skirts, bell-bottoms, T-shirts, long hair, and blue jeans provided a stark contrast to the button downs, flat tops, and bobby soxers of earlier years (378). Like Argue, many Americans expressed dissatisfaction with the status quo, but in the fast-paced, ever-changing landscape of the sixties, few could find suitable alternatives.

Cop-Out (1969) conveys the confusion experienced by Americans of this time in its contrasting stories concerning a cop on the beat and a high-flown private eye.

Written to be performed by two actors playing all the parts, Cop-Out portrays the Vietnam era scenes between "The Policeman" and "The Girl" "as if in a super-real documentary," while the "Arrow--world's toughest super-star"--scenes mimic "lushly stylized," "MGM dynamic" 1930's detective genre Hollywood films (11-12). Guare utilizes the stylistic movie approach (one actor plays both roles) to satirize the media images of the cop on the street and the tough-guy detective. As the script indicates, the "link" between the two stories is the "movie screen at the rear of the stage" (12).

In a normal world, the cop on the beat acts as society's guardian. Yet during the Vietnam War, street cops often became the adversary of civilian protesters. One of the most enduring images of the decade is the film footage of policemen beating the demonstrators outside the 1968 Democratic Convention in Chicago. Rather than the friendly neighborhood defenders who help children cross the street and know all the local merchants by name, the cops assumed a dubious aspect and, subsequently, became known as "pigs." Thus, the barricade, the only "realistic" scenery in the policeman\girl episodes of the play, may be seen to represent the new separation between citizen and police, the schism brought about by the civil unrest during the war.

In strong counterpoint to the documentary style of the policeman\girl scenes, the Arrow scenes provide a highly stylized and romanticized version of police work. Unlike the great movie detectives (portrayed by the likes of Humphrey Bogart), Arrow exhibits a blend of arrogance and stupidity that lead him to believe an old lady's crutches are rifles "sent to do Arrow dirt" (17). After getting the woman in a half nelson and nearly choking her to death, Arrow finally recognizes her as the "old lady who sells newspapers on the corner" (18). Indeed, Arrow's big case turns out to be an investigation into the murder of a pet cat. The audience also learns that Arrow is proud of the fact that he has only been bribed "fourteen times" (20). Arrow is not only stupid; he is corrupt.

The relationship between the documentary and the MGM scenes is an early demonstration of Guare's belief that the media can exert an unduly powerful influence on society. Guare employs the movie scenes to assert that Americans too often mistakenly take their sense of identity from media images, even when they are self-destructive and chauvinistic. Guare seems to be suggesting that the Hollywood image of the infallible detective and his gun moll is just that, an "image," one unconnected to reality. For instance, Arrow first appears as a silhouette behind the screen, pantomiming spectacular gun-play to the hypnotic flicker of a strobe light (16). Guare wants the

audience to know they are coming under the spell of a shadow. Larue's blind devotion as Arrow's mistress indicates that she is mesmerized beyond reason. Arrow holds a lit cigarette in Larue's neck and later grinds his foot into her hand, while she proclaims her love for him. Larue encourages his sadism: "Violate me in the violets in the vilest way you know. I love you, Arrow. Violently" (28).

Later in the play, the girl protester adopts behavior similar to Larue; she becomes Marilyn Monroe, the great and tragic media sex "symbol," and proceeds to sleep with most of the Presidents, from George Washington to Richard Nixon. (One should note that the same actress plays all the female roles.) Given the fact that Monroe had affairs with both John F. Kennedy and Robert Kennedy, Guare shows that even national leaders can come under the media's heady spell. Monroe, of course, has been characterized as the supreme Hollywood victim of male chauvinists and image makers. Guare makes the point that the media promotes female objectification and subjugation and that there is little difference between the "girl," Larue, and Monroe. (Monroe's suicide, moreover, serves as a fatal reminder about the dangers of a Hollywood make over.)

As the title of the play suggests, Guare wants Americans not to "cop-out" on personal responsibility but to awake from their enchantment. Thus, the girl protester

in the documentary scenes stands in for the public at large. She, however, is just as big a phoney as the policeman. She attends the demonstrations, not out of any political convictions, but because she has a crush on the policeman. The war carries no interest for her; and accordingly, the script indicates that "the signs she carries will always be blank" (11). Even though the policeman has previously beaten her, she remembers the event fondly. She happily reports: "My spit looked like a tear in your eye. Like you were crying because you had to do your duty . . . Could you please arrest me, so we can talk?" (22).

The policeman and the girl do end up in a clandestine relationship, one that results in a pregnancy. The cop fears the repercussions of his secret romance when he admits, "Jeez, it'd be better for my career, better for me to hang around with murderers or gypsy cab drivers than consorting with known demonstrators" (30). He decides to get a vasectomy. The girl would rather have an abortion, a "premature Caesarean," than lose her lover. He concedes: "I feel like I've thrown my life away because I love you" (33). In the end, having been exiled to a tollbooth, the policeman kills the girl for not paying a toll. The tragic nature of their relationship suggests that the political divisions of the sixties had a negative impact on private

life. In short, public pressures thwarted the mismatched couple's attempt to make contact.

Guare was roundly criticized for having the girl fall dead in the lobby of the theatre. (The audience had to step over her body to exit.) Beside being inconvenienced, the critics felt that Guare was being too obvious and didactic.[17] Guare later admitted that he might have gone too far, but, even as recently as 1992, he defended his original intention. Guare argued that he wanted the audience to have to "step guiltily over her corpse," a ploy that evokes the techniques and aims of the Living Theatre (Cattaneo 91). Nonetheless, Guare believes his work was misinterpreted, and even if the play missed the mark, Guare's intent to involve the audience cannot be overlooked. Guare wanted the audience to understand that all Americans needed to take responsibility for what was happening in the country, no matter how unpleasant, and to face features of the American self.[18]

First presented on a double bill with Cop-Out, Home Fires directly confronts the search for the American

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[17]Clive Barnes described the "miscalculation" as "foolish and essentially untheatrical" (Rev. of Cop-out 42).

[18]The critics, however, only seemed to be bewildered and confused. Guare described the reviews to be more like a series of "obituaries" (91). Kerr dismissed the play outright, "as unhappy as anything seen in the theater since your local high school last fumbled `The Torchbearers'" (D-11).

identity.[19] Set just after the armistice in World War I, the subject matter of Home Fires historically precedes that of Cop-Out; the work, however, relates the '60s experience of fear and paranoia by going "backward two generations" in time. By taking the audience back to the time of their grandparents, Home Fires demonstrates that paranoia and fear have been regular features of American history (and were nothing new in the sixties).

The "Smith-Schmidt-Smythe" family in Home Fires is struggling to come to terms with who they are. The Smiths want to be Americans, but their German heritage makes them targets for the bigotry of a suspicious funeral parlor director, Catchpole. Even though World War I is officially over, the ever-diligent mortician keeps a watchful eye on his German customers. Catchpole even goes so far as to suspect the dead Mrs. Smith: "One hears rumors that the Kaiser is a lady . . . How do I know this woman is not the Kaiser? If I discover that that woman is guilty of Germanity, out she goes" (92). Catchpole's paranoia reflects the same high level of suspicion prevalent in the sixties' middle-class, many of whom believed that those who opposed the Vietnam war were "un-American," and his

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[19]Many critics missed the thematic connection between the plays. For instance, Brendan Gill refers to the plays as "two interesting but unrelated episodes" (98).

pseudo-patriotic defense disputes the notion of America as a pluralistic nation.[20]

Nonetheless, the Smiths hide their heritage in order to fit in with American society. World War I has made their "Germanity" criminal, and consequently, the Smith family believes their German heritage cannot simply be assimilated--it must be denied. Peter asserts that he will not even have German thoughts. He tells his daughter, Nell, she "wasn't conceived in no German," that he "made love to [her] Mama in English" (96). Peter then blames Nell's hairstyle for Catchpole's suspicions. The daughter, however, refuses to undo the German braids in her hair because her Mama tied the braids as her "last act on this earth" (96). Unlike Peter, Nell resists letting go of her heritage. For Nell, her braids keep her connected to her mother (and to her family's culture) and have no bearing on her worthiness as an American citizen.

The play raises the issue of ethnicity to highlight the problem of establishing a uniform national identity. Guare insists that the evolved American identity has come to be somewhat of a pejorative image, associated with

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[20]Bercovitch contends that the idea of "white" America has always been a fiction. According to Bercovitch, in the mid-nineteenth century, America was a "stratified, pluralistic society, rife with ethnic and class divisions. One of every five Americans was a black or an Indian, one of every eight was a recent immigrant; in the urban centers, where $1,000 a year was an average middle-class income, only 1 percent of the population earned over $800" (20).

material wealth and outward appearances. For instance, while the Smiths grapple with the issue of assimilation, Guare introduces the audience to the Sullivans, "an Ideal American Family that can sing and dance" (89). The Sullivans perform a song of victory, try to get the audience to join the singing, throw flowers to the audience, then dance offstage. The Sullivans serve one major theatrical function in Home Fires, which is to provide the Smith family with an absurd, unsuitable, and unrealistic American model to emulate.

Soon after the Sullivans exit, Rudy, Peter's son, enters singing himself. Just like the Sullivans, Rudy performs with "style and swagger" (100). Indeed, by trying to hide his German background, Rudy does nothing but perform. His entire life becomes a facade. Eager to make a good impression, Rudy plants cards in the flowers which falsely indicate condolences from "J. P. Morgan . . . Jay Gould . . . Mrs. Astor . . . Flo Ziegfeld . . . [and] Johnny Rockefeller" (101). Rudy wants everyone to believe that he is on intimate terms with the richest, most important Americans, those who embody his notion of the ideal American. Consequently, Catchpole mistakes Rudy for a Sullivan and is highly disappointed that Rudy wants to grieve with the "grubbies" (102).

Rudy has not returned, however, to grieve his dead mother, but to steal a ruby ring from her finger. During a

sudden blackout, a battle ensues over the mother's ring. In the end, Rudy gives the jewelry to Margaret; he then undoes the braids in Nell's hair. Nell proceeds to dress in Margaret's fancy clothes before going next door to mingle with Sullivans. Rudy advises: "Go meet them. Go marry them. Get that Sullivan money." (109). Peter decides to flirt with the Widow Sullivan, and all appears to be ending quite happily. At the last moment, taking courage from the newly acquired ruby, Margaret reveals that she is not Anna Held's roommate, but is, in fact, her maid. Ironically, the stolen ruby has given Margaret the strength to be honest. Peter, the policeman, however, reveals that he had stolen the ring in the first place, and that is why the couple had to leave Germany for America. Everyone turns out to be a fraud. The play ends as Rudy faints in his father's arms with the "curtain rising and falling revealing a frozen tableaux of general confusion" (121).[21]

In Home Fires, Guare seeks to show how fame and fortune have become associated with the American identity. To the Smiths, being American demands a denial of their heritage and a pursuit of riches. In America, the Smiths learn that the ends justify the means; as long as one is wealthy, nothing else matters. The play, thus, challenges the very notion of the American dream; Guare maintains that

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[21]Guare's ending bears some resemblance to the final tableaux associated with Meyerhold's production of The Inspector General.

fame and fortune will never deliver on the promise of happiness and contentment. Rather, Guare insists that greedy pursuits lead people to abandon their true selves. In Home Fires, then, Guare depicts how the American dream often gets skewed, misinterpreted by a culture bent on material gain, and corrupted by a fear of anything that differs from the "norm."

Even though Guare criticizes the superficiality of outward shows of wealth in Home Fires, he does not advocate withdrawal from society as a fitting response to corruption. Rather, in A Day for Surprises, a one-act which followed soon after Home Fires, the playwright satirizes the timidity of those who escape from life in books. According to Guare, the second-hand experiences to be had in books will not substitute for real life involvement. At the very beginning of the play, Character B, Mr. Falanzano, remarks to the woman, "Your paste pot is dried up" (17). The metaphorical statement implies a kind of dusty, mummified state of being that accompanies a cloistered library existence. Consequently, when the two librarians confront the realization that the 28,000 pound stone lion outside the library has suddenly come to life, they make a desperate attempt to make contact. Character A, Miss Jepson, proclaims: "Life has handed us a surprise! There's so few surprises that I want to leap at the present life has given me . . . I want to leap before the lion eats

me" (19). The stone lion scares the two into action--but not quite.

A lonely Miss Jepson had been planning to "go home, curl up with a good book, like any other night--look at the phone and welcome even a Sorry Wrong Number" (18-19). The lion that has suddenly come to life has changed her attitude and routine of avoidance. As the lion growls just outside their door, Jepson and Falanzano decide to get together at her place and "start something between the covers" (19). However, the discovery that the lion has just eaten Miss Pringle, Falanzano's fiancee, sends Mr. Falanzano into a fit of despair, and he begins ripping all the books to pieces. After collapsing onto the heap of destroyed tomes, Mr. Falanzano proceeds to deliver a long monologue recounting his love affair with Miss Pringle.

Falanzano relates how the secret meetings between Pringle and Falanzano had occurred for a long while. Rather than actually make love, however, Pringle and Falanzano always "read" about making love. The fearful couple believed that nature needed some assistance. Consequently, the couple spent a great deal of time studying for their "final exam." When the moment to make love finally came, Miss Pringle decided to cover herself in Saran Wrap, and Mr. Falanzano wore "one hundred and twenty seven rubber devices on [his] erect bookmark" (21). Even so, Miss Pringle got pregnant. However, the sad progeny

turned out to be "not a child," but a "small undeveloped volume of the Complete Works of Doctor Spock" (21). Mr. Falanzano laments his "life has been lived in books," how "[he] had become a book" (22). He continues: "We all would've been better off if we'd never opened a book" (22).

Despite the playwright's obvious and oft-stated love for language and literature, A Day for Surprises urges individuals to make physical contact and not to deny their animal natures (Rose 120). In the case of the two librarians, who are removed from their bodily experiences, Guare uses a 28,000 pound lion to remind them of their biology. Books, television, and the boring routines of daily life can dull one's sense of being alive. Even in New York, the city which "every day presents you with something for horror, amusement, despair and . . . glee," people need to have their senses re-awakened (Guare Qtd. in Michener 84). As evidence of society's pervasive numbness, the play ends with the lion walking down Fifth Avenue, and "Nobody even looks" (22).

In the final one-act play of the sixties to be considered, Kissing Sweet confronts consumerism as an inappropriate characteristic of the American identity. The play is a jumble of commercial messages that decry materialism. The stage directions describe the action:

> Socks are filled with flour that are pounded down to make clouds of smoke. Lit cigars that are constantly puffed. Radios tuned to every different station, tuned loud, constantly clicked on and off. Any kind of

> noisemaker, pots pans clanked together. Nails driven into boards . . . Cans of beer and soda, opened, poured into vats . . . the cans are crumpled and thrown on the floor. Spray cans of hair spray, deodorant, shaving cream, sprayed at random in the air. During the play, as many stagehands as possible will bring out stacks of newspapers, garbage cans, so that by the end of the play the stage will be fully littered and the actors almost blocked from view (8).

Americans "buy" to the degree that they become buried in trash. Thus, the play assails the dangers of living in a society that cares only about what the next purchase is going to be.

Kissing Sweet demonstrates how material abundance can lead to a loss of perspective and misplaced social priorities. Rather than worry about the ever-growing piles of garbage on stage, the characters in the play have more important problems, like "neck odor," to solve (9). As television critic Robert Sklar asserts, "Simple remedies lie at hand. Merely shampoo, gargle, lather, spray. Happiness will be yours" (41). The play is a comic variation on the Puritan notion of achievement, one that quantifies (through the accumulation of material goods) success. Kissing Sweet satirically argues that such unrestrained consumerism re-defines our cultural mores. In short, excessive material acquisition endows the American future with a legacy of wastefulness, one that may prove to be insurmountable.

Indeed, according to the play's skewed logic, the use of products, like automobiles, is not to blame for

pollution. The play's scientific spokesman acknowledges: "If we didn't have any people, we'd have cleaner air" (11). The play ends as the actors disappear behind one final "volley" of trash heaved on stage by the stagehands (12). Guare's criticism of materialism in Kissing Sweet reveals the writer's understanding of the power of the mass media to sell products even when there is no demand in the marketplace. The result, according to Guare, is a wasteful, bloated society that is both greedy and unsatisfied.

The skit-like nature of Kissing Sweet, however, represents only a small portion of Guare's talent as a writer. In the second half of the sixties, Guare chronicled the ills of American society, and in doing so, demonstrated a determination to become more than an author of funny sketches. The one-act plays of the sixties helped to refine Guare's skill as a playwright and to consolidate his thematic concerns. A quirky variation on a traditional theme, Something I'll Tell You Tuesday uses young actors to put a sardonic slant on aging and intimacy in marital relationships. The Loveliest Afternoon of the Year depicts the alienation, loneliness, and absurdity of life in modern urban America. Muzeeka and Cop-Out utilize many of the experimental techniques of the Off-Off-Broadway movement to address the political and social issues of the sixties. Home Fires humorously examines the problems of nationalism

and identity that confront an ethnically diverse America. A Day for Surprises abandons the subject of politics to explore the importance of experience, while Kissing Sweet offers a cartoonish appraisal of modern American materialism.

Working in the fertile environment of the Off-Off-Broadway movement gave Guare local notoriety and encouragement to develop his skill. However, his early one-act plays failed to attract notice beyond the friendly confines of Greenwich Village. Indeed, when given professional, high-profile productions, Cop-Out and Home Fires opened and closed on Broadway in the space of one week. Guare's satiric criticisms and sometimes prophetic insights may have affronted his first commercial audiences. Yet all the early one-act plays are rich with ideas, language, social commentary, history, song and dance routines, wild monologues, vaudeville gags, and audience participation. Despite their commercial failure, Guare preferred not to drop out of the mainstream but to invest the traditional theatre with new ideas and methods. Rather than abandon the full-length play, as many in the Off-Off-Broadway movement advocated, Guare chose to work within the system.

Perhaps Guare's decision to keep The House of Blue Leaves rooted in reality contributed to the success of Guare's work. Because the characters are more human

(albeit at times crazy), the social satire rings true and becomes accessible to a wider audience. Indeed, Guare seems to succeed most when he is able to portray human characters combating a counterfeit media culture. The House of Blue Leaves represents the culmination of Guare's development in the sixties as an Off-Off-Broadway innovator (as he leaves the form of the one-act behind).

CHAPTER 2:

THE MASS MEDIA, REALITY, AND THE AMERICAN DREAM: THE HOUSE OF BLUE LEAVES AND RICH AND FAMOUS

During the seventies, the mood of America took a significant downturn, as the country was forced to face new limitations and a growing sense of uncertainty. Summarizing the anxiety of this time, essayist Christopher Booker (1980) asserted:

> We have in the past few years not only come to see that the future may not be all that light, [but] may indeed hold out to us the greatest range of catastrophes the world has ever known (5).

As the decade unfolded, the American dream, for many, appeared to become increasingly unachievable. A fivefold rise in the price of oil from irascible Arab oil ministers resulted in "cold houses and gasoline lines" in the U.S. for the first time since the Great Depression (Barnet, 16). In 1977, more American cars were recalled than were made. Furthermore, Bruce Kuhre reports:

> The distribution of income among individual workers, which became more equal through the 1960's and the first half of the 1970's, took a U-turn between 1975 and 1978, and has become more unequal ever since (33).

In sum, the idea of upward social mobility, so closely associated with the American dream (and John Kenneth Galbraith's "Affluent Society"), began to fade away in the seventies (35-36). A host of events signaled American vulnerability and decline--Americans had to come to terms with Watergate, the Arab oil embargo, new challenges from

foreign markets (i.e. the Japanese assault on the American automobile industry), continuing white flight from the inner cities, the rise of ethnicity, military defeat in Vietnam, the Iranian hostage crisis, inflation, stagflation, sky-rocketing interest rates, etc.

In his work of social criticism, Decadence (1975), Jim Hougan updates Susan Sontag's essay on science fiction, "The Imagination of Disaster," to show how Americans in these years sought to "neutralize their anxieties by surrendering to fantasy" (19). Hougan contends that America in the seventies was in a state of "utter metamorphosis" (19). Yet before the decade came to be associated with a decline in national spirit, The House of Blue Leaves (begun by Guare in the mid-sixties) confronted the subject of "limits: people limited by a lack of talent, limited economically . . . emotionally [and] geographically" (Guare Qtd. in Gale 220). The play portrays characters caught in the act, so to speak, of shedding their skin, in a desperate attempt to console themselves and realize their dreams through "surrender to fantasy." According to Guare, reality and the American dream rarely have anything in common; in the mass media, conversely, fantasy and the American dream are often coincident. In retrospect, Guare's work seems rather portentous in that his plays ably convey the sort of disillusionment prevalent in American society of the '70s.

According to Christopher Lasch, the sixties' counterculture endeavored to resurrect the "individual" in American society; for a while, this seemed to succeed until "the politics fell away, and the counterculture degenerated into a shallow search for experience and therapy" (The Culture of Narcissism Qtd. in Wilkinson, 241).[22] In Lasch's argument, the despair of the seventies did not result as a backlash against the revolutionary spirit of the sixties.[23] Rather, it was the mass media and a growing consumer ethic, which had been at work since the end of World War II, that in these years weakened American individualism and the Protestant work ethic. In other words, the collapse of the seventies had its seeds in the economic prosperity and lofty expectations of the fifties. Scholar Rupert Wilkinson comments upon the mass media's role in this phenomenon:

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[22]Bosoms and Neglect clearly demonstrates how therapy can devolve into a discourse of intellectual avoidance, rather than serve as a tool for growth and healing.

[23]Scholar Kennedy argues, however, that the mass media in the seventies created a "*meta*nostalgia" for the fifties in order to allay the country's disorientation in the seventies and make America forget the turmoil and change of the sixties (Platforms 6). According to Kennedy, however, the mass media was selling a fanciful version of the American dream that could not deliver real contentment because America in the seventies was an experiencing economic decline. Kennedy writes, "The seventies' fifties become a full-fledged industry, a market segment, an imaginary past intended to help the bummed-out masses blot out the present" (Platforms 6).

> Modern organization had taken away people's sense of personal, moral responsibility without providing a clear authority of its own. It encouraged people to manipulate each other aggressively while it massaged them with consumer goods and packaged experiences. Without giving people a sense of place, mass organization had taken over and distorted their sense of reality by barraging them with media power, from advertising and managed news to television shows and videos . . . . Overpowered by these smokescreens and degraded by the impersonal routines of modern work, people escaped into fantasy or into cynical detachment (242).

The relationship between the evolving "media power" and the prosperity of the Eisenhower years becomes clear when one compares Lasch's ideas to the work of social theorists Paul and Percival Goodman. Writing in the fifties, the Goodmans observed:

> The critics have shown with pretty plain evidence that we spend our money for follies, that our leisure does not revive us, that our conditions of work are unmanly and our beautiful American classlessness is degenerating into a static bureaucracy; our mass arts are beneath contempt; our prosperity breeds insecurity; our system of distribution has become huckstering and our system of production discourages enterprise and sabotages invention (Qtd. in Hartshorne, 174).

It might be said that Goodman and Goodman locate the "cause" of American cynicism and suspicion, while Lasch presents the twenty year cumulative "effects" of corporate media marketing in a surplus society.

Since the fifties the individual has been the target of the mass media's attempt to sell consumer goods by associating fulfillment with materialistic pursuits. Lasch asserts that by the seventies the "overpowering" influence of the mass media had indeed corrupted the American dream

(Wilkinson 242).[24] In short, the mass media glorified material gain, while discounting the work necessary for achievement. While Lasch's views on consumerism and media became prominent in the seventies, Guare had begun to assess the damaging influence of the television and movie culture almost fifteen years before The Culture of Narcissism (1979) was published.

In The House of Blue Leaves (1971) and Rich and Famous (1976), Guare depicts the lives of ordinary people who judge themselves according to the lifestyles exhibited in movies and on television. Guare's characters long to be celebrities who parade across television screens or Broadway stages. Guare, however, contends that the desire for success, when evaluated against celebrity "others," will typically lead not to gold at the end of the rainbow but to failure, isolation, and, sometimes, death. Like Lasch, Guare criticizes the mass media (which touches the lives of almost everyone in America), and its sale of life on the grand scale.

As the scholar John Harrop asserts, Guare's work signifies an "exploration of the national obsession with facile success and ephemeral glory . . . within the false value system" (152). In Guare's America, Artie Shaughnessy of The House of Blue Leaves replaces Willy Loman as the new

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[24]Lasch specifically attacks capitalism, but he considers the mass media to be capitalism's chief mouthpiece, advocate, and salesman.

"victim" of American corporate power and greed (Oliver, "Old and Improved" 68; Wilson, "Theater: A Smash Revival" 30). Where Willy modestly dreams of being the "number-one man" for his company and family, Artie dreams of leaving his family behind for fame and fortune, "laurel and loot, stardust and a place in the sun" (Malone 798-799). Artie's dreams are not of his own creation, however. They are dispensed by the media, piped into his head by movies and television. Willy's vision, conversely, seems linked to an earlier time in American history, when the Protestant work ethic still held sway. Artie, by contrast, seems to have lost all sense of community values and the dignity of work itself.

In The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism (1958), theorist Max Weber writes that the Protestant work ethic insisted on "the idea of the necessity of proving one's faith in worldly activity" (Qtd. in Hayden 15). By the nineteenth century, however, the industrial revolution had begun to erode the importance of individual initiative and achievement. Factory workers, who labored long hours at repetitive jobs, found themselves trapped at the lower eschalon of society. Configuring the views of Karl Marx, Perls writes that in the age of industrialism, "the soul of the workman is of no interest to the manufacturer . . . He needs the function of the 'body' only" (Ego, Hunger, and Aggression 121). The psychologist argues that the gulf

between body and soul, brought about by the industrial revolution, encouraged a societal neurosis that polarized the human personality. Accordingly, the lack of contact between work and product "upset the harmony" of the personality and, thereby, began to disintegrate individuality and creativity.[25]

Success in the nineteenth century, then, depended more on an individual's ability to sell a product than to make a product. Whether inspired by motivational speeches and sermons (from "Acres of Diamonds," Ben Franklin's Poor Richard's Almanac, or Horatio Alger's "rags to riches" tales of self-made men, salesmanship, and competition), the "will to win" became the trademark skill of the ambitious American in pursuit of the American dream (Bercovitch, "The Rites of Assent" 20). Hard work was no longer a guarantee of success; individuals had to be good salesmen, as well. Since personal qualities such as "willpower, self-confidence, energy, initiative," and, most important of all, "personal magnetism," made the best salesmen, appearance and image began to assume an exaggerated role in measuring success (250). According to the salesman's credo, if a person looked successful, then he probably was successful (248). Paradoxically, then, the individual salesman became his own marketable product.

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[25]Furthermore, the steady rhythmic pace of Henry Ford's assembly line made the worker more robot than creative human being or individual.

With the rise of corporate power after World War II and the ascendency of television, individual salesmen, i.e. Willy Loman, became an outmoded entity.[26] Advertising in the mass media could do the job on a national scale more efficiently than any number of individuals hauling worn-out sample cases across the country. In the post-World War II era, Americans in the pursuit of success were encouraged not to "sell" but to buy. In short, the media contributed to the transformation of the American population (from workers, to salesmen, to consumers).

While the original Protestant work ethic promised that hard work over time would guarantee success, the post-Willy Loman version of the American dream omits "hard work" from the equation. According to the modern mass media formula, success equals success. In other words, in post World War II America, the American dream could be bought; it was no longer linked to hard work or achievement. Consumption was the new key to success, and the mass media were the technological salesmen promoting the wares of an ever-expanding corporate America.[27]

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[26]Miller's use of the tape recorder in Death of a Salesman hints at the ascendency of technology over the now outmoded ways of "personal magnetism."

[27] In semiotic terms, the image of success on the television or movie screen became a signifier without a signified, i.e. the salesman. In other words, an image of a salesman on a television screen supplanted the need for an actual salesman.

For many Americans, goods and the good life became indistinguishable. As evidence of the country's consumptive appetite, in the first twenty-five years after World War II,

> The United States bent, burned, or melted about 40 percent of the world's nonrenewable materials . . . an appetite, Richard Nixon assured the American people, that was a badge of greatness (Barnet 16).

Scholar Richard Barnet contends that by the seventies, America had adopted the disastrous and callous view that all social problems could be solved by the increased acquisition of "wealth" (16). A 1980 report corroborates this contention:

> American society annually throws away 11 million tons of iron and steel, 800,000 tons of aluminum, 400,000 tons of other metals, 13 million tons of glass, 60 million tons of paper, 17 billion cans, 38 billion bottles and jars, 7.6 million TV sets, and 7 million automobiles (Hayden 35-36).

Americans had been transformed into people who were "self-aggrandizing, hungry for immediate gratifications, and eager to be admired, yet emotionally passive and distant . . . isolated, empty, and vaguely vengeful" (Lasch, The Culture of Narcissism, Qtd. in Wilkinson 242). The mass media had participated in creating a moral, spiritual, and experiential vacuum which plunged Americans into a collective identity crisis, one that proliferated purchases of what Mark Twain called "unnecessary necessaries" (Qtd. in Hayden 29).

In almost prescient fashion, The House of Blue Leaves and Rich and Famous investigate the ways the media infiltrates the lives of individual Americans. Theatre scholar Harold Clurman, for instance, suggests that Guare's characters are continually "aroused by [an] obsession with big shots, 'personalities,' stars, the in-tribe" (285). Both plays demonstrate how belief in the media's re-invention of the American dream promotes desperate acts, exploits based on unrealistic expectations. Guare contends that the mass media inhibits interpersonal contact, while parading offers of love, wealth, freedom, and happiness.

Nonetheless, Guare insists that individuals do have the resources to combat media influence. Rather, than rely on media ideals, Guare argues that Americans would do well to develop a commitment to family instead. According to Guare, however, media power is so strong that many fail to realize that a choice even exists.

The action of The House of Blue Leaves occurs on the day of the Pope's historic visit to the United States in 1965; Rich and Famous centers around the Broadway opening of Bing Ringling's 844th play. Spurred by the hype of these events, Artie and Bing address all their energies to the pursuit of fame and fortune, mistakenly believing that the dreams sold by Hollywood and the Broadway stage will bring them personal fulfillment.

At amateur night in a local bar, Artie sings, "I just need someone to hold close to me" (6), and on some level Artie does understand the deeper needs of his heart. Yet he believes the answer does not lie in his wife and son. As Clurman argues, "The only people who count for him are those who have 'made good'" (285). Bing, the struggling yet prolific playwright, does not want to escape to Hollywood *per se*. Like Dante, O'Neill, and Chekhov, Bing hopes to see his life glorified on the stage. Bing wants his life to be one "you'll want to read about . . . a life they'll write musicals about in twenty years" (7).

Yet within both plays, Guare ironically uses religion to pose the existential problem of living in the modern world. Guare seems to suggest that the media supplants the role of family in American life. In Rich and Famous, religion is considered as irrelevant, presented by a disheveled Hare Krishna street hawker. In The House of Blue Leaves, the Pope has been relegated to confinement on the television screen. Nonetheless, both The House of Blue Leaves and Rich and Famous maintain that religion holds genuine insights that the modern world that should not ignore.

In The House of Blue Leaves, Artie watches the Pope deliver a speech on television from Yankee Stadium. With the "only illumination in the room" coming from the television, the audience hears the voice of the Pope

describe America's "noblest" and most characteristic traits:

> a people basing its conception of life on spiritual values, on a religious sense, on freedom, on loyalty, on work, on the respect of duty, on family affection, on generosity and courage--safeguarding the American spirit from those dangers which prosperity can itself entail and which the materialism of our day can make even more menacing (52).

The Pope suggests that America's salvation lies in returning to "spiritual values" now obstructed by a "menacing" consumerism. Artie responds: "I'm glad he said that," though Artie proceeds to demonstrate that the Pope's message has eluded him. While trying to comfort Billy, the Hollywood producer, Artie can only say, "But that Pope is a handsome guy. Not as good-looking as you and me, but clean. Businesslike" (53).

In The House of Blue Leaves we see that the Pope's spiritual message has been "polluted" and "trivialized" by television (McCoy 156-157). With the Pope's powerful charisma diminished by the television screen, the message carries no more weight than any soap opera or car commercial. Later, as Bananas tries to make hamburgers out of Brillo pads, the Head Nun poses beside the television to get her picture taken with Jackie Kennedy (43). Theatre critic Frank Rich argues that Guare's satiric use of television in The House of Blue Leaves depicts the medium as a new type of religious icon in the American home, one that replaces the traditional institution of the church.

Rich writes that in Guare's world "movie stars and the Pope are indistinguishable media gods, in which television is a shrine" ("Theater: John Guare's 'House of Blue Leaves.'" C-21). In Guare's view television and the mass media generate injurious consequences--namely, an inability to differentiate between fact and fantasy, image and reality, (hamburger meat and steel wool).

Although Artie seems touched by Bananas' story about the Tonight Show, Artie forces Bananas to kneel in front of the television screen, pray to the Pope's image, and kiss the television screen in order to be healed. Director of the acclaimed 1986 New York production of The House of Blue Leaves, Jerry Zaks has pointed out that Artie needs for Bananas to be healed because Bananas stands in the way of Artie's plans (Bennetts C19). Zaks contends that all the characters in the play manipulate each other "because of their own desperate needs" (C19). Yet even in her deranged state, Bananas rejects Artie's neurotic and absurd attempt to achieve contact with the television image of the Pope. When Bananas laughs at her husband, Artie pushes her aside, screams for a newsman to get out the way, and proceeds to hug and kiss the TV, praying, "Help me--help me--Your Holiness . . . " (33). Through Artie's frantic attempts to contact the Pope on the television screen, Guare underscores the message that the media not

only distorts people's ability to comprehend reality, but may also drive people to the edge of insanity.

Guare's criticism of television highlights what media critic Neil Postman describes as an "epistemological shift" in American society; this involves a movement away from thought and content toward "image and instancy" (Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business (1985) Qtd. In McCoy 157). Artie knows from watching television that the Pope is handsome, but Artie does not really hear what the Pope has to say. TV critic Thomas S. McCoy writes, for instance, that "television employs the voice of entertainment and its discourse carries the terminology of show business" (157). Consequently, as consummate media hounds, Artie and Bunny judge the Pope's visit in The House of Blue Leaves more in terms of entertainment value than for its spiritual content. Artie and Bunny nurture the incredible hope that the Pope's visit will initiate their entry to show business. Bunny proclaims:

> Your holiness, marry us--the hell with peace to the world--bring peace to us . . . we'll be married and go out to California . . . out there with the big shots--out where you belong (12).

For Bunny, the Pope functions more as a theatrical agent than as a divine emissary (on a mission to stop the Vietnam War). Guare suggests that television's capacity to absorb, reduce, and deflate the Pope's message illustrates how Americans are "amusing [them]selves to death" by relying on

the media to direct their lives (Postman, Amusing Ourselves to Death Qtd. in McCoy 157).

By having almost all of the characters in The House of Blue Leaves "perform" in one way or another, and by emphasizing the accouterments of show business, Guare seeks to illustrate the manifold ways and the degree to which the mass media influence modern American life. For instance, Bananas believes she has to act like one of Artie's animals to get attention. Bananas, then, "performs" a dog act so that Artie will feed her. Artie complies by throwing Bananas her food, which she catches in her mouth. As Bananas "rolls on her back," Bananas reveals Guare's dramatic intention. Bananas concedes: "I like being animals. You know why? I never heard of a famous animal . . . by and large, animals weren't meant to be famous" (19). The fact that animals are not driven by ambition highlights the ephemeral and superficial nature of fame and fortune. Fame and fortune are strictly human constructs. Consequently, theatre critic Rich insightfully describes Bananas as a "battered mutt, the forgotten underdog that the bright lights of our national fairy tales always pass by" (C-21).[28] Bananas' dog act exaggerates her

[28]Guare often uses animal imagery to reinforce awareness of the biological nature of human existence. Guare may be highlighting what Percy calls the "dethronement of man" from "his central position in the Cosmos" (168). According to Percy, man is, after all, not a "very good animal, is often stupid, irrational, and self-destructive" (168). Guare employs animals to

loneliness and the degradation of her existence as Artie's forgotten wife. Later, when Bananas tells the story of her 42nd Street brush with glory, in true theatrical fashion, Artie mocks her by providing background music on the piano.

Artie's performances of his own songs signify his dream of escape to Hollywood. His amateurish music, lyrics and singing, however, betray the absurdity of his fantasy. As Clurman argues, Artie's tunes are "atrocious" symbols of grandiose foolhardiness (285). By having Artie continually perform the usually terrible tunes, Guare drives home the paradoxical point that Artie may be nothing more than a misguided, if sincere, dilettante who languishes in a lower middle class, prison-like existence. (The bars on the window of his apartment seem to resemble the cages of the animals Artie tends at the zoo.) Nonetheless, Artie's problems chiefly derive from his inability to understand

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demonstrate how humans feel both superior to animals because humans can speak, and inferior to animals because humans do not understand, appreciate or accept their animal natures. As Swedish psychologist Paul Tournier submits, animals lack "creative imagination" and are thus destined to repetitive, instinctual behaviors (The Meaning of Persons 99). Bananas' dog act adversely compares to the "automatic character" often associated with non-human animals (97). Animals lack "creative imagination" and are thus destined to repetitive, instinctual and thoughtless behaviors. In other words, an automatic life offers no escape from a routine, pre-determined destiny. Unfortunately, the humdrum, boring routine of daily life in America often seems to reflect more of the animal instinct in people and less of the creative aspects of the human personality.

reality or to see himself as he really is, not necessarily from his lack of talent.[29]

Bananas seems to be the only character in the play who has a sure grasp on reality. Consequently, Bananas is ascribed the role of outcast.[30] While Bananas exhibits truly bizarre behavior, the fact that Bananas knows that Artie has plagiarized "White Christmas" contributes to Artie's rejection of his wife. As theatre critic Kerr submits, Bananas' honesty provides Artie with a "link to the bitter earth" (ii:3).

Bananas "screams the truth and for doing so has to be sedated [and] sent away to the institution" (Malone 800).[31] After being forced to take her daily ration of pills, Bananas complains, "For once could you let my emotions come out? If I laugh, you give me a pill. If I cry, you give me a pill . . . no more pills . . . I'm quiet now . . . But once--once let me have an emotion" (17). Bananas knows the

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[29]Writing for The Wall Street Journal, scholar Edwin Wilson literally blames a signature lack of talent for Artie's downfall. Wilson seems unwilling to admit that failure could have anything to do with outside forces beyond Artie's control.

[30]Bananas' mental state and established "role" in the Shaughnessy family as the "crazy" person bears some relation to Michel Foucault's ideas on "madness" as a social construct. Indeed, Bananas seem to have those special spiritual insights reserved for the insane mentioned in "Stultifera Navis," in The History of Madness.

[31]Indeed, the price for her honesty and awareness could be compared to the imprisonment and torture of political dissidents.

truth. Bananas sees life for what it is--a world of suffering, avoidance, disappointment, pain, and heartbreak. As the bearer of her family's "psychic burden," Bananas knows that solace only lies in reaching out to one another (Malone 800). Bananas' plight, in essence, symbolizes the danger of accepting the reality of a culture hypnotized by media constructs.

Having rejected Bananas and her realistic appraisals of his talent, Artie turns to Bunny, his mistress, who is even less talented than Artie, for inspiration and support. Artie likes Bunny because she tells him what he wants to hear. While Bananas functions as the bearer of truth, Bunny encourages Artie's escape from reality. As critic Malone contends, Guare portrays Bunny as a "strutting compendium of hackneyed sentiments and Dale Carnegie optimism" who sanctions Artie's Hollywood fantasy (800).[32] Indeed, in rather confident fashion, Bunny claims to know a "classic" when she hears one. When she compares "Where is the devil in Evelyn?" to "I Could've Danced All Night," Bunny brags: "I didn't work in Macy's Music Department for nix. I know what I'm talking about" (12).

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[32]Interestingly, not a single review encountered in the research for this project made the first reference to the fact that Bunny Flingus derives from the word "cunnilingus." The omission may have something do with both the obvious nature of the pun and a certain amount of reluctance to speak openly about sex in American culture.

As Artie's misplaced faith in Bunny's judgment reveals, most of the characters in The House of Blue Leaves shun reality. Artie, for example, does not know the first thing about Ronnie, his near-psychotic son, whom Guare describes as part "gargoyle," part "skinny cherub" (35). Artie dreams that Ronnie will one day become the Pope because Ronnie leads a "charmed" life (17). When Ronnie arrives on the scene, he immediately contradicts Artie's story:

> My father tell you all about me? Pope Ronnie? Charmed life? How great I am? That's how he is with you. You should hear him with me, you'd sing a different tune pretty quick (35).

Even when Ronnie informs Artie of his murderous intent to "blow up the Pope," his father refuses to hear him or see the real nature of his son. Artie vacantly replies, "Ronnie, why didn't you write and let me know you were coming home?" (49).

Ronnie then reveals how he lost faith in the American dream as a young boy (in Guare's autobiographical Huck Finn monologue). Momentarily, he becomes one of the few characters in the play to remove his mask (35). Yet since he failed to win the role of Huck Finn so many years ago, Ronnie determines that he will become famous by blowing up the Pope. After showing the audience the bomb and relating the details of his humiliating audition before his Uncle Billy, Ronnie proclaims, "By tonight, I'll be on headlines

all over the world. Cover of Time. Life. TV specials" (37).

Ronnie and Artie, however, are not alone in their delusions of grandeur. Like this pair, almost everyone in The House of Blue Leaves describes his or her life and feelings in media-based terminology. Critic William A. Henry argues:

> For these hungering egos, any notice, any brush with glory will do. The upshot is at least four deaths, three shattered romances, one imprisonment, one resignation from a convent and the needless scorching of two Brillo pads ("Irreverence" 77).

Accordingly, the "Little Nun" tells Corinna the movie star, "I saw 'The Sound of Music' 31 times. It changed my entire life" (43).[33] Guare implies that the Little Nun joined the sisterhood because of nuns in a Hollywood film (not because of any sincere devotion to religion). Bunny compares serving cornflakes to a "coming attraction" and the Pope's visit to the premiere of "Cleopatra" (16). Later Bunny

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[33]I know from personal experience that the real Maria Von Trapp operated a lodge in Vermont and used to take visitors on tours of the family graveyard and pose for pictures. Von Trapp's escape from Nazi Germany inspired The Sound of Music, perhaps the most popular American musical of all time. Indeed, the movie version of The Sound of Music made Julie Andrews a superstar and made Von Trapp a sort of living legend. On my visit to the lodge I remember hearing someone say we were going "to see a real life Julie Andrews." Even though I had not seen the movie, I remember feeling a little sick when someone else asked the aged woman to sing. Von Trapp politely declined, but then led us to the gift shop to sell us taffy and t-shirts. It seems that Von Trapp had become a parody of herself in the form of both a lodge hostess and the "real" version of Julie Andrews.

tells Bananas that she has "seen a dozen like [her] in the movies" (21). In fact, Bunny never really talks about her own experience. Rather, she prefers to compare her life to the movies and movie stars (It may be that the movies are all she knows). While urging Artie to call Billy, Bunny claims that she once had Marlon Brando's phone number (27). When Bunny disparages Bananas' fear of electric shock treatments, Bunny gives a lengthy account of "Sandra Dee's Night of Hell" (23). To Bunny's bizarre sense of morality, the loss of a movie star's hair curlers is more traumatic than Bananas' electric shock therapy.[34] In such instances, Guare criticizes the media for elevating trivial problems to a level where "spotty dishes" or hair curlers can seem to cause real pain (Sklar 44).

Indeed, Bananas' mental breakdown can be directly traced to a humiliating encounter with Jackie Kennedy, Cardinal Spellman, Bob Hope, and Lyndon B. Johnson on the corner of Forty-second Street and Broadway (31-32).[35] As a sort of latter-day Blanche Dubois, Bananas finds herself "mocked" on the Tonight Show after her New York encounter

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[34]Critic Oliver compares the play to a "whole series of shock treatments"(68).

[35]Her story compares in veracity to the stories "He" tells in The Loveliest Afternoon of the Year.

with the four celebrities (Rich C-21).[36] Bananas recalls her humiliation:

> I turn on Johnny Carson to get my mind off and . . . they tell the story of what happened to them and everybody laughs. Thirty million people watch Johnny Carson and they all laugh. At me. At me. I'm nobody. I knew all those people better than me . . . I know everything about them. Why can't they love me? (32).

According to Guare, Bananas is not to blame for her embarrassment. Indeed, theatre critic Michael Malone asserts that Guare's "contempt is reserved for the culture, not the creatures, who have fed on its junk food of TV and tabloids" (800). Writing for the New York Times, Rich argues that "Bananas' pathological relationship to glamorous American myths becomes grotesquely symbolic of a national psychosis" ("Theater: John Guare's 'House of Blue Leaves'" C-21). While Bananas' humiliation at the hands of Bob Hope and Johnny Carson may be a far-fetched theatrical metaphor, Guare does not exaggerate the power of the mass media to influence and dominate the American psyche. Sadly, Bananas longs for celebrity contact, because "she can hardly get herself noticed in her own home" (Henry, "Irreverence" 77).

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[36]Novelist Percy describes a six-week encounter between a movie crew and the townspeople of the movie's location in Lost in the Cosmos, "both actors and town folk have reached for what they perceived to be a heightened reality, it, reality itself, has somehow fallen between them, like a dropped ball" (42). For Bananas, however, the "ball" has fallen on her head and caused some lasting brain damage (Rose 120).

The pursuit of such futile strategies for fulfillment contribute to the fading of morality and values in The House of Blue Leaves. Artie parades Bunny in front of Bananas with no compunction whatsoever. He even inaugurates his relationship with Bunny by raping her in a steam room. In one of the play's recurring gags, Bunny tells Artie that he can have sex with her anytime, but that she will not cook for him until they get married. Bunny, however, abandons Artie within hours of Corinna's death to go with Billy.[37] In keeping with the inverted order of this world, nuns fight over tickets to see the Pope. Artie finds solace in Corinna's death by anticipating a new elevator (necessitated by the explosion). Guare's jumbled morality demonstrates how obsession with success can erode community values. Everyone in the play at one time or another seems to be a Machiavellian power broker.

His characters' misplaced priorities notwithstanding, Guare advocates the notion of connection through family.[38] Indeed, a grieving Billy reminds Artie how lucky he is to

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[37]Leanara does the same thing to Bing in Rich and Famous. Leanara leaves Bing's play after the opening night preview to go to Hollywood to do a TV series.

[38]In the movies, as Bunny is quick to point out, Rock Hudson can be an atomic scientist posing as a plumber come to fix Doris Day's bathtub (The House of Blue Leaves 26). In real life, however, Hudson turned out to be the first prominent gay celebrity to die of AIDS. Indeed, the day Hudson went public with his illness, Day was at his side. The romantic, idealistic image of the couple was shattered, yet despite the horrific reality of Hudson's illness, his movies and TV shows continue to run on television today.

have "married a wonderful little Italian girl" (59). Nonetheless, Artie has spent the entire play flaunting Bunny in front of Bananas, ignoring his wife, and force-feeding her pills. Bananas intrudes on his fantasy, yet she refuses to give up on her husband. After the explosion which kills Corinna, Bananas sings Artie's plagiarized song while she pretends to vacuum the house using the hose only. Bananas seems strangely content and resolute about maintaining her home and her marriage:

> My house is a mess . . . Let me straighten up . . . I can do that . . . I'm a housewife . . .[She sings] I love you so I keep dream . . . [Her singing breaks off] . . . Artie, you could salvage that song. You really could (51).

Despite her fragile mental state, Bananas longs to re-establish intimate contact with Artie. In her brief, yet moving, "mad-scene" of vacuuming, Bananas keeps hope alive for the renewal of love and meaningful experience with her husband. Where Bunny often reveals a distinct and exaggerated lack of taste and talent, Bananas shows the audience that she would actually like to help Artie become a better songwriter. Artie, however, ignores the devotion of his wife and chooses to live within the isolation of his own fantasy world.

Although Artie feels betrayed, Guare suggests that Artie's chance for redemption lies in his acceptance of Bananas. But as the critic Walter Kerr contends, Artie suffers from a "new kind of double vision" (II3). As Billy

departs, he admonishes Artie by saying, "I just saved your life" (63). When everyone has left, Bananas makes overtures of forgiveness and reconciliation to Artie:

> I don't blame you for that lady, Artie . . . I'm going to cook for you now . . . Oh God, Artie, it's like we're finally alone for the first time in our life. Like it's taken us eighteen years to get from the church to the hotel room and we're finally alone (63).

Even though Bananas appreciates the opportunity to renew their marriage, Artie is not listening to her plea for contact; he only hears the sound of his shattering dreams.

As Stockard Channing, one of the actresses to play the role of Bunny, points out, Artie feels trapped (C19). Artie's darkened living room becomes a prison of "barren security," where the mass media both encourages and prevents escape (Thomson 117). Tragically, however, the living room also becomes an execution chamber in the play's final moments. Coming to grips with the fact that he has lost his dream, Artie responds by killing the only truth he knows. In the glow of a blue spotlight, Artie quietly strangles the helpless Bananas.[39] With the death of Bananas, the play suddenly loses its farcical tone and becomes tragic. While the murder may seem to come out of nowhere, Guare uses the act to highlight the deadly combination formed by the the media and the American dream, one that leads Artie to destroy himself and his family.

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[39]In the play's prologue, Artie complains that he has been denied the use of a blue spotlight: "You promised me a blue spotlight" (6).

In Rich and Famous, Guare takes Bing, the play's central character, on a comparable existential journey. With results similar to those that destroy Artie in The House of Blue Leaves, Bing's fantasies work on an even grander theatrical scale, as they lead him to the Broadway stage. Where Artie continues to hold down a day job as a zookeeper (Artie's life at home may be the same sort of vigil), Bing diligently works as a professional playwright, one whose life has become completely dominated by the theatre. Moreover, Artie's dilemma seems more straightforward than does Bing's; Artie wants to escape his life in Queens and go to Hollywood. Bing, however, does not necessarily want to escape from his suffering. The young playwright simply aspires to transcribe the events of his life into a play that will live on the Broadway stage. In Rich and Famous, then, Guare has written an autobiographical play about a playwright who writes autobiographical plays (Markus 332). Caught in a spiraling maze, Bing's pursuit of fame and fortune generates distortions of reality that approach the confusion found in a "hall of mirrors" (Wilkinson 242). Undaunted, Bing dreams of experiencing what he sees in movies, theatre, and television. Like Artie, Bing also relies on a fallacious system of media values to accomplish his dreams.

McLuhan describes the mass media and television as a "closed system" that reflects images of an extended version

of the self, not the true self (Understanding Media 41). Media critic Sinclair Goodlad agrees that television, as the most invasive form of mass media influence, reduces "the dominant codes of society" to the lowest common denominator, offering only "cliché for approval" (213-214). The result is a sort of "etherealized" sense of self, one that evaporates in the realization that it does not differ from any other self in the "cliché-ridden" mass population (McLuhan 188). Using Bing (sincere though he may be) as an extreme example of the modern media-dupe, Guare critiques the mass media in post-World War II American life and its exhortations that everyone can achieve the dream of wealth and fame--while in reality, only one in a million (or less) can reach that goal.

In films and television shows, characters lead the kinds of dramatic, powerful, and glamorous lives that elude most ordinary citizens. Then the actors (who perform those roles) appear on talk shows to inform the public how wonderful life as a celebrity can be. Commercials interrupt to notify audiences that they, too, can partake of the good life, provided they buy the product being advertised. The selling of soft drinks, beer, and automobiles often deploys the American dream as a subtext. Mercedes Benz, for example, employs the phrase "Sometimes you get to drive your dream." Beverage commercials depicting the glamorous world of beautiful young people

cavorting on the beach belie the impossibility of the viewer joining in the celebration.

As perhaps the most prolific undiscovered playwright in history, Bing believes he deserves that kind of reward for years of unrelenting toil. Even though Bing relates that his plays were "ripped out of [his] guts" (8), Bing admits to exaggerating the suffering in his life so that his plays and his own life might appear more glamorous. When Leanara asks Bing if he is "in as much pain as the play says," Bing confesses, "You see I make up bad things about myself so I'll be more interesting" (8). In short, Bing believes that the fictive suffering of his stage persona will generate in reality fame, fortune and admiration.

Through the course of Rich and Famous, however, Bing discovers to his alarm that the mass media and its representatives only want to manipulate him, as a faceless member of the abstract public at large.[40] Bing frequently complains about the circle of failure in which he struggles, "I can't get a grant because I haven't had a hit, but if I had a hit, I wouldn't need a grant" (22). In American culture, Bing's amazing perseverance does not guarantee success. Because Bing has bought into the media's ideas on fame and fortune, the American dream has

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[40]Soren Kierkegaard characterized the public as a "monstrous abstraction, an all-embracing something which is nothing" (264).

become an "abstraction" for him, one that leaves the idealistic young playwright "spiritually bankrupt" (Rich C19).

Once Bing gets a play on the Broadway boards, Bing discovers the depth of his desire to succeed. Talking about his "R & F" cufflinks, Bing concedes: "If my play flops. I'm going to be wearing them D & B. For dead and buried. O & O. For over and out" (9). Like Artie, who complains that he is "too old to be a young talent," Bing announces that he is "not going to be the World's Oldest Living Promising Young Playwright" (The House of Blue Leaves 63 & Rich and Famous 9). Bing bets everything on the success of his Broadway play. The trouble is that his work has been produced for dubious reasons; Veronica, Bing's producer, believes the play to be a sure-fire disaster. Veronica entertains a different fantasy. She needs the play to flop so that Bing might "have a comeback . . . [like] all the great comebacks. Nixon. DeGaulle. New York. Judy Garland" (13).

Employing the episodic approach found in Muzeeka, Rich and Famous chronicles, in a straightforward but theatrical and unrealistic manner, Bing's journey toward self-discovery. The play moves through Bing's series of episodic encounters with the agents, artists, actors, composers, parents, girl-friends and victims of the mass media, all who have influenced his dreams of being "rich

and famous." As in Cop-Out, Guare suggests, but does not insist, that two supporting actors portray all those Bing meets, a strategy that illustrates the "sense of suffocation around Bing's life that escape from the narrowness of his innards" is impossible (6). Furthermore, Guare employs the type of religious comic irony found in The House of Blue Leaves to pose existential questions in the piece.

Instead of invoking the Pope, however, Guare goes to the opposite end of the religious spectrum to find an atypical messenger of truth. Guare halts Bing's quixotic quest for fame and fortune during the character's brief "Interlude" with a Hare Krishna boy. Scraping from his feet the "dog dirt" he acquired in a "rapturous" dance, the Hare Krishna boy begs Bing to listen while he reads from the Bhagavad Gita:

> Please, mister, I'm new to the organization and they won't feed me if I don't do this. 'When the mind leaves behind the dark forest of delusion, you shall go beyond time past and time that is to come--when in recollection he withdraws all his sense from the attractions of the pleasures of the sense . . . then his is a serene wisdom' (32).

The Hare Krishna boy then "dances off, stumbling" leaving Bing alone, yearning for "home" (32). The boy delivers his message like a bumbling, door to door salesman; yet Guare's use of "dog dirt" makes it plain that "withdrawing" from the senses is no easy task. His encounter with the Hare Krishna boy complete, Bing longs to escape the pressures of

pursuing his dream and simply go home. Like "Dorothy" in The Wizard of Oz, Bing mumbles: "Home. Home. I want to go home. Home. Home. Home" (32).

As a naive young playwright Bing[41] struggles to find himself in the flashy world of show business, but the Hare Krishna boy warns him against the lure of fame and fortune. Despite a string of failures, and his awareness that he is "dreaming somebody else's dreams," Bing believes fulfillment lies in publicly displaying his life on a Broadway stage or a movie screen (34). As a modern day "Candide," as critic Brendan Gill describes him, Bing does not understand that such a pilgrimage keeps him in the "dark forest of delusion" (Gill 77). Even after numerous travails (that should have had a maturing effect upon the writer), Bing tells Tybalt, "I'm going to write about a guy . . . A boy really . . . Who keeps seeing life through everyone else's eyes" (44). As critic Barnes suggests, Bing resolutely remains in the "still center of his own nightmare" (15); Bing seems to comprehend his own existential plight, though he amazingly decides to write

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[41]William Atherton, the actor who portrayed Bing on Broadway, was also the star of the film, The Day of the Locust. The Day of the Locust which came out in 1975, just two years before Rich and Famous, tells the story of a young artist's heartbreaking journey through "Hollywood's nether world" in the 1930's (Maltin 271). The role of Bing, then, seems to be a reprise of sorts for Atherton. Several critics make reference to The Day of the Locust in their reviews of Rich and Famous. Typically, the critics seem to prefer The Day of the Locust.

another play about his own life (rather than simply living his life).[42]

By setting Rich and Famous in the world of the theatre, Guare demonstrates the inappropriateness of living one's life as though it were a theatrical script. In order to emphasize Bing's loose grasp of reality, then, Guare deploys the mechanics of theatre and Broadway musicals throughout the play. Guare writes, "The show is designed as a performance piece . . . The play is about the theatre; keep it theatrical" (6).[43] Life, then, for Bing, is a performance, a grand exercise in denial, which encourages the dismissal of truth and reality. For instance, Rich and Famous begins with a "glittering overture from any terrific Broadway musical," followed closely by a bossa-nova-beat tune. Where Guare utilizes songs in The House of Blue Leaves to accent Artie's lack of talent, Rich and Famous presents such songs as full-blown production numbers, as they would appear in a Broadway musical. However, Guare's

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[42]Bing's devotion to self-indulgent fantasy evokes Lasch's ideas on narcissism. According to theatre critic Barnes, Bing has "fallen in love with the grin on the face of his own image" ("'Rich and Famous,' Play About Writer Opens" 15).

[43]Barbara Fraser argues that many seventies' musicals, like Applause and Follies, portrayed the backstage world of the theatre as "not a glamorous world, rather a place of competition, manipulation, and inhumane treatment of ordinary people" (34). In other words, it seems that the musical theatre in New York in the seventies stole Guare's thunder when it came to satirizing musical theatre.

songs adopt satiric and pessimistic lyrics which oppose the bright and bouncy music to which the lyrics are set.

During the song immediately following the overture, we see Bing and Leanara on their way to his big opening on Broadway. Rather than expressing the anticipation of the moment and the joyous culmination of his dreams, as one might expect, Bing's song, "Don't Be Sure," alerts Leanara not to trust him. Bing sings, "I. I. I. Will always love you. Don't be sure. I. I. I. Will never leave you. Don't be sure" (7). Later, with her legs dangling over the edge of a garbage can, Veronica, as a bag lady in disguise, lampoons the Broadway torch song:

> Lonely again
> Open the med'cine chest of my mind
> Sweep the Clairol and the Crest from my mind
> Till I find Valium
> Librium
> Vacuum!!!!!(17).

Rather than vowing to face whatever heartache that comes, in the long established heroic tradition of Judy Garland or Bette Midler, Veronica opts for oblivion. Guare removes the saccharine tone from his lyrics in order to reveal the ways that the musical theatre can sugar-coat reality.

In the grand finale just after Tybalt's suicide, Bing confronts mirror images of himself. The song, however, does not inspire the hope of a new tomorrow (like a traditional musical), but grotesquely recounts Bing's many disappointments. The trio sings:

When life is gone,
Candles guttered down
We'll say we didn't get as promised
When will life be
The way I want it to be???????? (45).

Guare intimates that the dreams of wealth and fame propagated by the media engender wants that will never be fulfilled. As critic Rich asserts, such "starry-eyed fantasies do little but drive everyone bananas" (C-21). In Rich and Famous, the surprising irony in Guare's songs establishes Guare's mistrust of musical theatre's optimism. Where some Broadway composers might encourage the audience to "put on a happy face," Guare suggests that the audience take off their masks; the work argues that one should face reality--even though Guare's characters seldom see themselves or each other as they truly are.

Guare's characters search for escape and fulfillment at any cost. When Bing encounters Tybalt, the famous movie star in Rich and Famous, atop the billboard over Times Square, Bing discovers that Tybalt's real life has been overtaken by his celebrity. Bing has climbed up to see "life once through Tybalt's eyes" (40). To his surprise, Bing finds Tybalt on the scaffolding, ready to commit suicide. But as theatre critic Clurman maintains, it is Tybalt's "success," not failure, as a movie star that leads him to the brink of death (318). Tybalt does not want to die, but his managers have determined that suicide would be good for his career.

In Tybalt's world, the media's power is absolute. Tybalt will gain immortality, legendary status on a par with Marilyn Monroe and James Dean, but Tybalt will not be alive to enjoy the glory. In this case, the price of fame and fortune is death. According to Tybalt, Norman Mailer is handling the promotions:

> Norman then is doing a beautiful, has done it already, picture book, you know, for coffee tables, a book of my life and death and why. Why. That's the title. Then they'll make a play out of it. Then a movie version. Then a stage musical of the movie. Then a movie musical of my life. Then a TV series. Then a spinoff. They'll be looking for someone to play me. They'll be starting a major search to find me. Maybe you could go up. Audition. (42)

Tybalt has even filmed scenes to be inserted into old Marilyn Monroe movies so that Tybalt and Marilyn can "seem to appear together" after his death (42). In light of Natalie Cole's recent video duet with her long dead father, Nat King Cole, Guare's drama seems almost prophetic.

The power of the media, and the way it divorces people from experience lies in the media's ability to convince individuals that their real lives are insufficient. In Rich and Famous, everyone wants to be someone else, someone more glamorous. Bing wants to be Tybalt and also wants Tybalt to be him. Bing declares that Tybalt would "even make a better me" (11). Veronica wants to be a bag lady (and a failure) who makes a comeback instead of just being a successful producer. At the extreme, Anatol Torah's

desires border on the cannibalistic; the megalomaniacal composer seeks to consume everyone he meets.

The self-centered composer recounts how "Jesus" appeared in his room, because Jesus "wanted to meet [him] once before he died" (26). Then Anatol announces that the encounter did not satisfy him:

> But now you see, Bing, I've lost myself. I had myself so firmly in my hands but now I've lost myself. I met you and I thought I was you. You were me . . . I was you. A team. Perfect collaborators. But no, I'm not you, I'm Tybalt . . . Get him for me. Give Anatol back his body (26).

Anatol's emptiness maliciously propels him to Hamburg "once or twice a year" to a "death bar" (26). Anatol describes how he meets people who come there to be killed and what the experience provides him:

> When my vague double enters . . . I take a length of piano wire . . . and I squeeze a symphony out of that man's body and I pretend it's my own body and I squeeze the evil out of it, squeeze the death out of it, squeeze the fear out of it, squeeze the failure out of it . . . I have to go to reality for the one thing art can't give me . . . I must fill myself with death in order to feel life . . . A good death douche . . . Get Tybalt. Find him. Bind him. I will be Tybalt. Tybalt will be I. I will be Tybalt. Tybalt will be I (26-27).

Anatol signifies Guare's worst-case illustration of the self-indulgent artist, one who can no longer experience life save through the thrill of a perverse yet rejuvenating form of violence.

Anatol's entire life is a projection of his own frustration and emptiness onto others. Perls might suggest that Anatol's psychotic ramblings and murderous aggression

are misdirected because the composer has lost contact with reality and his biological functions (Ego, Hunger and Aggression 110-111).[44] Bing's innocence makes him a perfect target for Anatol because the naive young playwright fails to sense the danger. In this case, however, Bing projects all his desires onto Anatol, not vice versa. Bing proclaims, "Mr. Torah, yourself plus myself--not since E = MC2" (27). Growing bored with Bing, Anatol complains, "What I hate most about art is it's on the side of life" (27). He dismisses Bing because the composer covets a bigger prize: "Bing, darling, you don't have enough self for yourself. Tybalt will be my new collaborator" (27).

Bing slips away and runs into Allison, his high school sweetheart, who holds the same misunderstandings about Bing as Bing does about Anatol. Allison tells Bing, "I'm so happy to read about you . . . To know somebody's life turned out the way they wanted it to" (28). Bing's real life, of course, bears no resemblance to Allison's fantasy. Rather, her image of Bing's life reflects her own unrealized desires.

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[44]Critics have charged that Guare's characterization of Anatol is excessively drawn. Guare, however, may have been commenting on New York gossip. When I lived in New York from 1980-1984, I heard numerous rumors (perhaps part of popular urban mythology) about famous New York musicians purportedly engaged in behavior similar to that of Anatol.

Allison's own life is so dismal that she "literally" escapes into a painting. The stage directions indicate that Allison "simply steps through the frame into the picture" (30). Once inside, she entreats Bing to join her: "Come on in Bing. This is our past . . . It's so safe in here. This is our past" (30). When Bing hesitates, Allison explains her motivation, "You see a movie you like, don't you just walk right into it" (30). For Allison, Bing represents someone who "invented" his own life, who got what he wanted, what he dreamed about--who got the American dream.

When Bing goes to visit his parents, Bing learns that they are also living through him and that their understanding of his life is absurd. Like Bing, the parents are obsessed with celebrities. Bing's Dad observes, "You must be getting laid like crazy" (33). While Bing's father recites an unending litany of celebrities, Bing's mother proclaims, "We never minded if you had an Oedipus complex because Oedipus was a King" (34). Dad counters, "A Dennis King. Billy Jean King. That's my girl. My Ziegfeld girl" (34). Yet when Bing confesses that his play "might not be very good," Mom and Dad go into a rage. They have been waiting for this moment of projected fulfillment for a long time; they have gone so far as to have all six thousand of Bing's dirty diapers bronzed. Now Bing disappoints them by failing on Broadway.

When Mom and Dad read the reviews, Dad pulls out a gun and shoots at his son. Bing responds by pulling out his own gun and shooting Mom and Dad. The parents do not die, however, because "They don't give Pulitzer Prizes to boys who kill their parents" (39).

Bing crawls into bed with the two of them and begs for comfort. Bing then describes how in attempting to re-write Dante's Divine Comedy, he could not conceptualize Purgatory, a failure that underscores his existential and artistic dilemma:

> All that left me with is Purgatory and the prime sin of Purgatory is people not seeing reality for what it is. But I only gave that part of the play one page. Let me see life the way it is so I'll know what to do with it. Let me see reality for what it is. Let me see things the way they are so I'll know what I have to do. Tell me how to live my life and then get out. I want you out of my life . . . I want my own life (39).

Bing professes a desire to hold a mirror to life in his work. Yet his pursuit of wealth and fame prevents Bing from having any genuine concept of reality, experience, or artistic integrity. Bing relates that as a youth all he wanted was to be touched, to have his feet rubbed. Bing, however, never enjoyed such essential physical contact. As a consequence, Bing looked to the fictional media (the theatre) for life's answers. In fact, when Bing pleads with his parents for help, he discovers that Mom and Dad have not heard a word he has said. After Bing's Purgatory speech, Mom comments, "Your play will be wonderful, Tybalt"

(39). The parents then "serenely" drift off to sleep, unaware of Bing's presence altogether.

In the end, Bing sees the power of the mass media exposed in Tybalt's suicide. Even then, however, Bing wants to believe that theatre can exorcize his demons. While Bing dreams of writing a play about his encounter with Tybalt, Tybalt jumps to his death. Bing muses:

> Will the guy make it? This fella. This boy. He can fail. He could win. It's a tightrope act. You can't tell. And it's a play. In a theatre (44).

Once again, Bing demonstrates a self-indulgence as his fantasies distract him from reality; in this case, from saving Tybalt.

In grand theatrical and Oedipal fashion, Bing responds to Tybalt's leap by trying to dig out his own eyes. Unlike Oedipus, however, Bing experiences no recognition or reversal. Unlike the outcome of Greek tragedy, Rich and Famous ends with no restoration or sense of balance.

Even though Bing seemingly tries to rid himself of his cufflinks (and their burden), Bing discovers to his dismay that, for him, there is no escape. Bing suffers from a modern form of media-induced hubris which traps the starry-eyed playwright in a cycle of destruction. As the final stage directions of Rich and Famous indicate, Bing and his doubles, i.e. the reflexive "us," fail to rid themselves of the media's influence:

> Bing very proudly and easily removes one cufflink and tosses it with great resolve in front of him. The other two follow suit. Bing tries to undo the other cufflink. It won't come loose. It's a struggle. It won't come out. He does not want to give it up. He can't give up that final cufflink. He lowers his hands in dismay. The other two follow suit. The lights fade on Bing (45).

While the simple act of removing a cufflink may not be as powerful as Tybalt's leap from the billboard, the important point to note in the closing image of Rich and Famous is Bing's unwillingness to remove the second cufflink (the issue of personal responsibility). Removing a cufflink should not be difficult, as easy as turning off a television set. Bing has a choice, and like many Americans (who do not turn off their televisions), he prefers the world of fantasy. Despite having the answer at his fingertips, Bing's reticence reveals the depth of feeling and complexity which accompany his desire for fulfillment.

In Rich and Famous and The House of Blue Leaves, "looking out for number one" results in disillusionment, failure, and death. "Bored with [the] problems of others," Artie and Bing find themselves in the throes of broken dreams, failed marriages, dead-end jobs, and lack-luster futures (Yankelovich, New Rules: Searching for Self-Fulfillment in a World Turned Upside Down (1981) Qtd. in Wilkinson 270). Social theorist Daniel Yankelovich writes that Americans in the sixties and seventies sought to "expand their lives by reaching beyond the self, but the strategy they employed resulted in constricting their

lives, drawing them inward toward an ever-narrowing, closed-off 'I'" (278). There could be no more apt a description of the final moments of both The House of Blue Leaves and Rich and Famous--Artie is left alone in the solitary haze of a blue spotlight, deserted by his friends, all his dreams shattered; Bing is perched atop a billboard, in a searchlight's glare watching his alter-ego commit suicide.

Mirroring the cynical atmosphere which pervaded America in the seventies, however, Artie and Bing represent archetypal victims of the mass media who, with disastrous consequences, reject reality in favor of fantasy. Having witnessed the fantastic public suicide of his movie star friend, Bing finds himself trapped in a glittering production number featuring nothing but replicas of himself. Reluctant to remove the "R & F" cufflinks,[45] Bing knows he will never escape his dream of being rich and

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[45]Writing for The New Yorker, Gill either missed or saw another ending from the script's ambiguous closing. Gill noted that Bing threw both cufflinks away with "equal flourish" (77). The script, however, calls for Bing to be unable to remove one of the cufflinks. Terry Fox, however, relates that during the previews for Rich and Famous, Guare went out in front of the curtain "at the beginning, middle, and/or end of each performance and narrated for the audience scenes that were not yet written but which, he had decided, needed to be done" (34). Given the failure of Rich and Famous and its subject matter, Guare's behavior mimics Bing's and casts Guare, like Madam Von Trapp, in Baudrillard's role of being a "hyper-real" version of himself and Bing. The idea of the "hyper-real" will be directly addressed in Chapter Five.

famous. Artie, on the other hand, responds to being left behind by his dreams by killing his wife, who, unlike the media, represents the mirror of truth.

Just as many Americans in the economically declining seventies seemed to focus on the individual pursuit of "finding one's self," The House of Blue Leaves and Rich and Famous characterize desperate quests for success that rely on fictive models. Neither Bing nor Artie accepts themselves as they are. Consequently, the pair expend enormous energy constructing elaborate performances in the pursuit of media "ideals." Artie and Bing discover, however, that such pursuits resist reality and, as Perls might argue, leave the pair "with a feeling of inferiority, impotency, and even despair" (271). Time after time, Artie and Bing encounter the truth, but fail to integrate the experiences in their lives. Although Guare aptly portrays the media's power to shape perceptions of reality and influence the pursuit of the American dream, the author does offer each character a chance for redemption. In both cases, however, they fail to escape. Unable to resist the media's allure, Artie and Bing opt for a surrender to fantasy (rather than confront the limitations of their daily lives). In sum, the media has become their surrogate reality.

CHAPTER 3:

FAMILIES IN CRISIS:
LANDSCAPE OF THE BODY AND BOSOMS AND NEGLECT

One of the most troubling characteristics of American society since World War II has been an extended breakdown in the structure of the family. In the 1950s, social historian Riesman characterized the initial stages of the family's decline as a shift in influence: Americans in the fifties began to pay more "attention to . . . signals" coming from outside the home than to those inside the family (The Lonely Crowd, Qtd. in Wilkinson, 61). As Americans struggled to out-maneuver the fear and uncertainty that marked the decade, these "signals" were often associated with idyllic, but unrealistic, representations of the family on television. Indeed, seventies' critic Hougan argued that the apprehensions of American culture produced a widespread nostalgia for an unreal past:

> Cut off from the future by a sense of impending catastrophe, submerged in a present whose aspect is pure menace, we accept a bowdlerized past with uncritical remorse, luxuriating in the bathetic strobe of deceits flashing by one after another. It's not our lives that pass before our eyes . . . but a paraparade tuned to the oom-pah-pah of reminiscence (109).

Seen against the backdrop of national decline in the 1970s, the distance between "reminiscence" and reality seemed to grow ever larger, and the structure of American families changed more drastically than at any time in history.

Written near the end of the decade, Landscape of the Body (1977) and Bosoms and Neglect (1979) portray the identity crisis which beset the American family during the seventies. The plays reflect the rapid and unprecedented changes in interpersonal dynamics brought about by the sixties' social revolution. Landscape of the Body and Bosoms and Neglect thus introduce characters in search of fulfillment and intimacy in this transitional period of American history, an era when the function and makeup of the family, American society's basic structural component, underwent dramatic alteration. In both plays, Guare argues against any reliance on fantasy and high-flown ideals. For Guare, family members should reach out to one another in the struggle to survive--no matter how difficult the circumstances.

The sixties had in a significant way exhausted America, and many sought a "dreamy retreat" from the uncertain situation of the seventies (Emerson 45). After having failed to come to terms with life in an uncaring city, Betty (in Landscape of the Body) seeks her own retreat to Nantucket Island (Harrop 153). In Bosoms and Neglect, Guare too delineates an individual in crisis; in this play he dramatizes the decay and destruction which has resulted from Scooper's neglect of his mother. As theatre scholar and director Lloyd Rose maintains, "Guare's characters are desperate to avoid reality, so it falls on

them and smashes their heads" (120). Consequently, Landscape of the Body and Bosoms and Neglect resonate with painful issues of private life--involving intimacy, individualism, and avoidance--which were prevalent in American society at large during the decade of the seventies (Kennedy, Platforms 2).

The traditional post-World War II nuclear family, revered in such fifties' television shows as Father Knows Best, began to disintegrate in the 1970's (Gilbert 64). By mid-decade, the U. S. Department of Labor would report that the "typical" American household--families with a "working father, a domesticated mother, and two children--represented a mere seven percent of all American families" (Carroll, It Seemed Like Nothing Happened 279). President Carter's "Commission for a National Agenda for the Eighties" documented a fifty-nine percent rise in the number of single households between 1970 and 1979 (73). By 1980, as a result of the maturation of baby boomers and a marked increase in life expectancy, almost twenty-five percent of Americans lived alone (Carroll, It Seemed Like Nothing Happened 280). Moreover, from 1966-1976, the divorce rate in America doubled, eventually climbing above fifty percent, while the marriage and birth rates steadily fell to new lows (Carroll, It Seemed Like Nothing Happened 278; Kennedy, Platforms 2). Consequently, single-parent

families in American society became more and more commonplace.

It is significant that ninety percent of single-parent families during the seventies had a woman as the head of the family. As of 1979, "one in every seven families, a total of 8.5 million families, was led by a woman" (President's Commission 74). At this time, among the nation's blacks and Hispanics, almost fifty percent of the families were managed by a single parent (74). Even among the traditionally configured middle class families, women were no longer staying home to take care of the children but were going to work (to help pay the bills and to follow their own career choices).

The reasons for this striking remodeling of the American family are manifold and diverse. First, the decade represents the period when the sweeping social changes of the sixties settled into mainstream America (Kennedy, Platforms 2). Especially for minorities and women, the sixties' struggles for freedom raised challenges to existing norms and stereotyped roles. In 1963 Betty Friedan characterized the social expectations of the traditional mother and woman as the "feminine mystique" (Gilbert 64); Friedan insisted that the American woman was being forced to conform to an ideal that constricted women's career and lifestyle choices. Denying this tradition, women who chose to work or stay unmarried

"risked guilt and neurosis" (64). Throughout the sixties and seventies, however, women asserted their right to defy the "feminine mystique" and diversify their experience. As a result, the traditional nuclear family was regarded by many women as a construct of societal repression, one that demanded an overt political response. By the mid-seventies, a striking transformation was underway; women were supervising families, advancing in the work place, and challenging the prejudices of the political establishment.

The family was also affected by a dramatic expansion of self-directed pursuits in the 1970's. It seems that remnants of the sixties' revolutionary spirit encouraged "everyone . . . to pose as a rebel, a mystic, an antiestablishment type--even staid members of the power elite" (Kennedy, Platforms 3). In short, the liberation movements were to a large degree co-opted by the middle class. Popular culture critic Kennedy contends that, in these years, the "left wing--already dispersed, fragmented, and burned out--began to seem irrelevant as the establishment itself became antiestablishment" (Platforms 3). The vaunted rights, freedoms, and privileges of the individual, which had been central characteristics of the American identity since the days of the pioneers, only served to intensify personal pursuits in the seventies (Erikson, Childhood and Society 316). It may be that

conventional notions of the American identity may have contributed to a loss of community in a time when community was most needed. The seventies, thus, became known as an era of self-indulgence, a time where everyone was out for himself or herself. In the seventies, family no longer proved a "haven in a heartless world" but a battleground where individual demands outweighed and outnumbered family and communal issues (Lasch, The Culture of Narcissism Qtd. in Carroll, It Seemed Like Nothing Happened 280).

Economic pressures were another factor which worked to transform of the structure of the American family. Runaway inflation in the seventies often meant that one income could no longer support a family (President's Commission 75). For those single-parent families, managed mostly by women, the problems of inflation were even more pronounced. For this population, such economic conditions, combined with a lower wage earning potential, created an alarmingly high rate of poverty. Moreover, many working mothers could not afford to provide adequate child care arrangements, a problem which only weakened the mother's ability to protect and guide her family (President's Commission 75). Families in the seventies were not only breaking up and re-forming in non-traditional ways; they were fighting to survive.

Television and the mass media contributed to the confusion of this time by both encouraging and resisting the changes besetting the family in the seventies. Shows

like "The Odd Couple," "Mork and Mindy," "The Mary Tyler Moore Show," and "Three's Company," embraced the idea of living single in America (Kennedy, Platforms 103). Speaking as the country's moral arbiter, President Carter, however, voiced a more traditional approach. Carter counseled Americans to get back to basics:

> We need a better family life to make us better servants of the people. So those of you living in sin, I hope you get married. And those of you who have left your spouses, go back home (Qtd. in Gordon 540).

Shows like "Happy Days," furthermore, seemed to advocate and promote Carter's vision, even though such images of the nuclear family evinced a longing for the innocent and nostalgic home life promulgated in the fifties. It may be that the television executives who produced such shows recognized and capitalized on the "malaise" afflicting the American populace in the 1970s. TV critic Sklar writes that,

> That white frame house in the suburbs is fading from the grasp of those who haven't got it already, and those who've got it are having a harder time paying to heat it (Prime-time America 20).[46]

Television may have noted the changing makeup of American families in the seventies, but old-fashioned values were often advocated in the script, even when the show purported to reflect seventies' style changes and independence

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[46] In one rumor I heard, O. J. Simpson is reported to have said that he was unhappy and jealous because he wanted the "wife and the white picket fence" and he didn't have them.

(Kennedy, Platforms 104). "Laverne and Shirley," a spinoff of "Happy Days," portrayed an unconventional family of two women living together and working in a factory; despite this situation, the world of the series was imbued with traditional homespun values. Indeed, "Laverne and Shirley" seems more like the female version of "Happy Days" than any ground-breaking advance in television programming.[47]

Perhaps even less innovatively, Norman Lear updated "All in the Family" in the late seventies and situated Archie Bunker as a single parent running a bar and raising two young nieces (Kennedy, Platforms 104). Despite the growing influence of women and minorities, Lear, an avowed liberal, paradoxically continued to rely on Archie's proven success. According to seventies critic Carroll, even though Lear viewed Archie as a parody of bigotry, millions of Americans, particularly men, found Archie as a character to admire (It Seemed Like Nothing Happened 61-62).[48] "Archie's Place" may have sought to reflect the changes occurring in the American family over the decade of the seventies, but a truer representation would have featured

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[47]A recent special episode of "Roseanne" featured visits to the show by "TV Moms," like June Cleaver, from days gone by. All the pre-Roseanne mothers marveled (at the star's power) at the issues, like a kiss between two women, that "Roseanne" was allowed to address.

[48]Lear's "make over" of Bunker masks Bunker's true character in ways that are similar to many Southern politicians of the sixties, like George Wallace and Lester Maddox, who retreated from their racist rhetoric rather than give up their political aspirations.

Edith as a single widow (and star of the show). Kennedy asserts: "Not only did Archie mellow from a virulent racist . . . he actually began dating" (Platforms 104). Not surprisingly, Edith was conveniently dead; there could be no divorce in the Bunker house (Platforms 104).

Despite the fact that most American families in the seventies were decreasing in size, "The Waltons" offered solace to economically hard-pressed Americans by showing a close-knit, large, hard-working, upstanding family making their own way during the Great Depression (Platforms 106). Moreover, shows like "The Brady Bunch" and "The Partridge Family" fused broken and fractured families into new improved communities, ones that mingled modern social outlooks and traditional morality into a recipe that could rival the idealism of "Father Knows Best" or "The Donna Reed Show." However, the easy optimism expressed in shows like "The Brady Bunch" may have engendered more cynicism than contentment. As Kennedy argues, "Our own lives seemed like pale imitations of the show, and we tried our best to mold our inadequate families into Bradylike bunches" (Platforms 105).

Even when television attempted an accurate portrayal of family life in America, the result worked to highlight the social dilemma of the seventies. For instance, Kennedy and Carroll both cite the PBS 1973 documentary, "An American Family," for crystallizing the domestic dilemma of

the seventies (Kennedy, Platforms 105; Carroll, It Seemed Like Nothing Happened 61-62). As surrogates and symbols for all American families, the Loud family revealed its problems, which reflected the distress of all Americans. The fact that by the end of the documentary the Loud family had broken up in divorce and one son had announced his homosexuality contributed to a general sentiment of foreboding, confusion and despair that pervaded the American family during the seventies. A spokesman for President Carter argued:

> There isn't a human relation, whether of parent and child, husband and wife, worker and employer, that doesn't move in a strange situation . . . There are no precedents to guide us, no wisdom that wasn't meant for a simpler age. We have changed our environment more quickly than we know how to change ourselves (President's Commission 71).

Yet despite the seeming destruction of the traditional American family, critics and Americans in general continued to uphold the family as the key to fulfillment in the modern culture. Social theorist Paul Wachtel contends:

> We had grown so tall we thought we could afford to cut the roots that held us down, only to discover that the tallest trees need the most elaborate roots of all (169).

At this time, a Gallup poll indicated that ninety percent of Americans in the seventies placed family as the top priority in their lives (President's Commission 71). The family may have been changing in the seventies, even in drastic ways, but it continued to endure.

The opening image of Landscape of the Body shows Betty casting bottles-- which contain the story of her life--into the waters off Nantucket Island. Guare's opening gives evidence to Betty's own familial confusion, though it also speaks generally to the disintegration of the American household. Further illustrating this dilemma, Scooper, in Bosoms and Neglect, although his reliance on analysis may resemble and, indeed, support Wolfe's obsessive "Let's talk about me" approach evident in seventies' psychotherapy, is, nonetheless, searching for a way to grow up, reconcile his past, and begin his own family. Scooper tells his mother, "I have this fantasy that one day you and I will have a scene that will clear everything out between us and I can lay you to rest while you're still alive" (51). While Scooper grapples with inner psychological demons, Betty struggles against the violent forces of a decaying urban America. Faced with the realization that the big city offers danger and imprisonment (rather than freedom and independence), Betty dreams of finding herself in the ideal American family; she aspires

> to [go to] the movies and eat at McDonald's and take summer trips to Maine to see . . . grandmother and see free Shakespeare in the park and take long rides on the subway to the Bronx zoo and the Brooklyn Botanicals (29).[49]

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[49]Betty's inability to handle her freedom as the newly liberated woman in the urban jungle compares to the experience of African-Americans in August Wilson's Joe Turner's Come and Gone. Wilson's characters find neither opportunity for advancement nor hope for reuniting

Betty's idealism and Scooper's psychological obsession with his mother represent Guare's argument that, despite the confusions and cynicism of a post-60s American culture, individual Americans continued to regard domestic bliss (and the structures of the family) as the way to achieve fulfillment.

Although most theatre critics overlooked the importance of family in Landscape of the Body and Bosoms and Neglect, both plays define the problems which confronted the American family in the seventies. The works illustrate the ways the American family was changing and in a significant fashion outline the problems assaulting the family institution. Landscape of the Body and Bosoms and Neglect debunk the unattainable ideals of the American family portrayed in the media and generated by the culture at large. In fact, the plays consider the dangers of pursuing such unattainable notions. Each work confronts the legacy of the past, those positive and negative memories which complicate family intimacy and encourage the projection of blame and the avoidance of personal responsibility. Guare urges his characters to take stock of the past in the hope of finding some sort of link to one another and for an explanation of their present pain and suffering (Harrop 162). In short, Guare's plays call for

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long-separated families in the immigration to Pittsburgh.

the restoration of familial commitment as the way to achieve personal and communal fulfillment.

Guare highlights the changes occurring in family structure and makeup in the seventies by focusing on non-traditional family structures in both plays. As historian Nicholas Lemann points out, the social reforms of the sixties, particularly the civil rights movement, opened a "Pandora's box" that spread rapid changes throughout all phases of American society in the seventies (44). As a result, the traditional nuclear family "ceased to be so dominant a type of American household" (44). Guare mirrors the changes occurring at this time and the traditional working husband, nonworking wife (both in their first marriage), and their children do not appear in either play.

As a single mother raising her son alone, Betty, in Landscape of the Body, serves well as an emblem of changing family compositions in America in the seventies. Betty travels to New York from Bangor, Maine with her son, Bert, to reunite her family. Betty is not, however, searching for the boy's missing father, but, rather, hoping to find her sister, Rosalie; she hopes to bring Rosalie back to Bangor to live with their mother. In fact, Betty's venture to New York represents an attempt to remake her family of origin, to bring back her childhood and live in an ideal past. Betty has no intention of staying in New York. Upon first meeting Rosalie in the city, Betty talks to her

sister as if Rosalie were still a child: "Rosalie, you got to come home. You're growing up not knowing your family. Your nephew. Our mother" (19).

Indeed, everyone that Betty encounters in her journey represent fragmented, non-traditional family groupings. For example, Rosalie encourages Betty to get herself "unsaddled from Momma and that house" and begin her own family (21). Rosalie's idea of family, however, does not mean having one husband and two children in a comfortable suburban setting. On the contrary, Rosalie's "family motto" is "She Travels Fastest Who Travels Alone" (21). While Betty is welcome to share Rosalie's new world, Rosalie tells Betty that Bert is a nuisance:

> Ditch the kid. He comes from a whole other rotten period of your life. Erase those tapes. Get rid of him. I got a pull-out sofa. Move in. We can have some laughs (21).

Rosalie wants no part of motherhood or family in the traditional sense. According to Rosalie, having Bert around would only slow the sisters down.

Freedom from Bangor and motherhood does not, however, mean freedom from stereotypical female roles. Rather, Rosalie simply trades in the traditional maternal role for its opposite extreme, one that is no less constricting, that of a porn star, I. e. whore. At the time of Rosalie's death, Betty discovers that Rosalie's life had been anything but glamorous and liberated. Rosalie had become a junkie who had fallen into "the hands of the mob" (15).

Paradoxically, Betty becomes a victim of Rosalie's drug habit, too, "forced to make the [pornographic] films to work off the bread she [Rosalie] owed them [the Mob] for smack" (15).[50]

Guare suggests that the sisters' experiences in the city contribute more to their oppression as women than to their freedom from the feminine mystique. Coerced into assuming Rosalie's roles, Betty loses her independence immediately. Guare may be insinuating that the city represents the darker side of a cultural patriarchy. In other words, if the suburbs entrap women in the role of mother, the city may enslave women in the sex trade.

In Landscape of the Body, Betty finds herself in what could be described as a worst case scenario--she is both whore and single mother. Indeed, one of the reasons the detective Holahan suspects Betty of Bert's murder is that he cannot reconcile Betty's willingness to perform in pornographic films with her claims of love and concern for her dead son. Holahan sarcastically refers to Betty as "Miss Life Style of the Future" (13). With some venom, the detective declares:

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[50] Betty's indifference to sex even though she makes porno films reflects the boredom that pervaded the seventies. Kennedy describes how the sexual revolution of the sixties had become as flat as day old cola by the time Plato's Retreat hit the mainstream. Kennedy writes, "Orgy-going had been reduced to an activity as solitary and blank as watching TV" (Platforms 109).

> And I find it a fantastic fact that a woman who gives head in twenty five cent loops should be in here for taking head. To get rid of the son's head that contained the eyes that saw her life (13-14).

Guare's embattled portrayal of Betty's family adventure supports the notion that the American family of the seventies bore little resemblance to the ideal family often presented in the media.[51] Some of the top ten television shows of 1977, the year Landscape of the Body premiered in New York, included "Laverne and Shirley," "Happy Days," "Three's Company," "Charlie's Angels," "All in the Family," "Little House on the Prairie," and "One Day at a Time" (Gordon 541). Some new television shows for 1977 included "The Love Boat," "Chips," and "Eight is Enough" (541). With the exception of "One Day at a Time," none of the above shows features a single middle-class mother like Betty. In "One Day at a Time," however, the single mother surrounds herself with a loving, tight-knit community support system right in her own apartment building. The "super" may be wacky and strange, but he is always close by and ready to help. In fact, this character always seems to be in Bonnie Franklin's apartment.

In Landscape of the Body, Betty has so little contact with her son that she never even suspects that Bert belongs

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[51]Theatre critic Gussow aptly characterizes Betty as "a young mother seduced and emotionally strangled by the city . . . a tourist from the provinces transmogrified into an urban combatant" ("Stage: Guare's 'Landscape' Revived" 20).

to a criminal gang. When Betty first arrives in New York, she acts like a fearful, naive child. After eighteen months in the city, however, Betty has become completely immersed in city life. Stage directions indicate that "Betty is quite snappily dressed and a lot more sure of herself in the last months since we've seen her" (28). By now, Betty has completely assumed all of Rosalie's city roles. Betty even takes over as Raulito's lover as well as Rosalie's job at the honeymoon agency. Betty's conversion to city dweller, however, only serves to distance her from her son. Betty orders Bert: "Stop winding all those watches. I never saw anyone for finding so many watches. Find 'em and wind 'em. That's your name. The watch monster" (28).[52]

Guare seems to suggest that while Betty's inattention may be linked to her position as a single mother, struggling to survive in the urban jungle, she should not be excused for neglecting her son. In perhaps the way that Artie refuses to listen to Ronnie's confession of wanting to blow up the Pope, Betty resists the obvious, and therein lies her guilt. As a mother, Betty should recognize that Bert would not have the money to buy or the good fortune to find so many watches. Betty refuses to admit that her son has become a thief.

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[52]Guare got the idea for the watch collecting image from observing real young people in his neighborhood (Fox 35).

In the case of "Little House on the Prairie," as with many other family programs, America literally watched the children on the show grow up under the ever-watchful eye of loving and open parents. Since the show was set in pre-industrial American frontier, times were hard for the Ingalls' family (as they were for Americans in the seventies). Yet somehow the TV family always pulled through. If Michael Landon's father character had neglected his TV children (the way Betty treated Bert), the show would have featured an edifying lesson on the importance of family communication. The Ingalls' family succeeded as a unit and dealt with a variety of difficult issues week after week. The fact that Landon had a large family in real life seemed to lend him even more credibility as the star, producer, and sometimes director of "Little House on the Prairie." For viewers, the portrayal of such a productive family may have helped to assuage the disappointment and cynicism of life in the seventies. In Landscape of the Body, however, Guare contends that pursuing the ideal family image may create a negative effect because families in real life may not be able to measure up to such an exaggerated standard of perfection.

Betty desperately yearns for the accouterments of the ideal family life, like picket fences and "White painted rocks lining the roads pointing the way where you go up to

the big house" (45). However, Betty's own attempt to approach the ideal American family misfires. In response to Bert's question about why they do not participate in normal family activities like vacations and outings, Betty bemoans her failures: "Because they're things families do together. Because they remind me how I screwed up my life" (29). Betty has not seen her husband, Bert's father, for years, yet Betty describes him as "a god . . . the handsomest man I ever saw" (29). Marked by a "creepy" penchant for remembering military serial numbers, telephone numbers, and addresses, Betty's husband has forgotten his own wife and child. Responding to Bert's question about why his father left them, Betty protests, "A blind spot. He forgot you. He forgot me. For a guy with a memory" (29).

Betty ended her relationship with her husband years earlier because he abused Bert (he put Bert's head in the toilet.) Betty, however, continues to uphold in an unrealistic way the importance of the father in family life. Betty refuses to believe that she and Bert are a legitimate family in and of themselves, without a father figure. She betrays her emptiness and her idealism when she entreats Bert not to "turn . . . against [his] father" (29). It is very important to Betty that Bert "love [his] father" (29). Bert, however, remembers very little about

his father save his "dreams sometimes of water rushing" round him (30).

Betty's need for a fantasy family outweighs the needs of her son, whom Betty abandons, when Durwood, the "Good-Humor" crazy man, comes calling.[53] Paradoxically, Durwood arrives to take Betty away from New York at the very moment when Betty and Bert finally make contact as a mother and son (and as a family). Betty has been sharing with Bert her painful memories of her best friend Mavis, who died from breast cancer, while Bert shampoos her hair. When Betty begins to remember the pain of Mavis' suffering, Betty reveals her desire to avoid the reality of death. Realizing her impulse to fantasy, Betty asks Bert:

> Rub the hair. Wash it out. More hot water. More bubbles. More soap. Get it all out of my head all the bad into a bubble and fly it away and pop it. Get it out (40).

Bert responds to his mother with tenderness, but Betty fails to see that she and Bert can be whole in and of themselves. Durwood, however, offers Betty a way of avoidance. Betty, almost immediately upon his invitation, decides to leave with Durwood, even though he refuses to include Bert in his offer of marriage.

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[53]Like President Carter, Durwood comes from the South. Guare may be mildly criticized for portraying Durwood as the stereotypical sun-baked, inbred lunatic from Dixie. The trouble is that there are some "Durwoods" in the South.

Durwood's definition of family, however, should have alerted Betty to the error of leaving Bert behind. Durwood explains:

> A family's like a body. A perfect body. The man's the head. The woman's the heart. The children are the limbs. I don't want any limbs from any other bodies. No transplants allowed. You hear me? Only out of us (41).

Durwood's reasoning insists on denying the reality of Bert's existence. Durwood's idea promotes the kind of separation and exclusion that creates an uncaring society. Because Betty's own family history represents failure and disappointment, Betty falls for Durwood's magical solution. Durwood's invitation to paradise, however, turns out to be just a mirage. Tragically, Bert's abandonment ends in Bert's death and dismemberment. Betty arrives in South Carolina only to be sent packing on the next bus back to New York by Durwood's family; she then is forced to face Holahan's accusations of murder.

While Betty's personal responsibility for the care of her son (and his murder) may indeed be the subject of legitimate debate, there can be no question that Guare's presentation of the city, as a destructive power, accelerates Betty's domestic difficulties. Guare indeed invests the city of the seventies with a malevolence that defies logic and law. When Holahan interrogates Betty, the detective reminds her of the frequency of matricide in New York: "Things like you did happen all the time. We even

had a spot quiz last week on a woman, went into a depression, drowned her two kids" (11).[54] Betty angrily responds to Holahan's insinuations by declaring,

> I want my boy buried in Bangor, Maine with his grandparents and his aunts and his uncles. I want him buried in Bangor with my father, with my sister Rosalie. Where I'll be buried when I die. I want him there. I want him out of New York (11).[55]

In Guare's New York, violence, death, and the bizarre represent the only certainties of urban life. Throughout Landscape of the Body, Guare uses popular mythological stories to heighten the sense of urban dread. Bert's adolescent cohort in crime, Joanne, tells stories about black widow spiders hiding in lacquered hairdos, and cobra

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[54] In light of Susan Smith's confession of drowning her two young sons, perhaps Guare himself would be surprised at the spread of such violence, typically associated with big cities, to a very small town in South Carolina in the nineties. Although Truman Capote's 1966 novel, In Cold Blood, which portrayed the "senseless and tragic" murder of a "perfect American family, generated the same kind of disillusionment and fear (Gilbert 74-75). Scholar James Gilbert writes that the American family, "if perhaps not murdered by society . . . was doomed by the extreme pressures of modern life and changes in values. Furthermore, In Cold Blood represents the kind of "New Journalism" employed by Capote, Mailer, and Wolfe, where the authors "stressed their own participation in the events they experienced" (74). Given Guare's penchant for adapting real life events into plays, Capote, Mailer and Wolfe may have been preparing the way for Guare's autobiographical style of playwriting.

[55]Betty's horrifying experience in New York favorably compares to Kennedy's assessment of Patty Hearst's ordeal as a hostage turned criminal. Kennedy believes that without community "we were all in danger of becoming Patty Hearst" (Platforms 90). Guare might suggest that the urban jungle could similarly create innumerable tragic replicas of Betty.

eggs hatching in blouses, which kill their unsuspecting and innocent victims (19, 30). In the modern urban setting, according to Guare, danger can come from anywhere at any time. Guare's depiction of contemporary urban absurdities resonated with Newsweek theatre critic Jack Kroll:

> Hardly anyone in 'Landscape of the Body' leads a real life, and yet we strangely feel we've encountered their ilk in the actual world. New York's alleged Son of Sam killer, who explained that he took his instructions from the barking of a dog,[56] could have come right out of a Guare play. In 'Landscape,' murder and ridiculously casual death live in the streets like impish demons ("Cracked Mirror" 66).

Theatre critic Oliver agrees that the "theme of unpredictability--of the chanciness of everything, especially death--runs throughout the script" (Rev. of Landscape of the Body 144). In other words, in such a hostile environment as the city, hopes, dreams, and plans can be shattered simply by over styling a hairdo or by reaching inside a drawer in a department store.

Despite her numerous setbacks, Betty searches for the answers to her problems in the past. Betty's floating bottles, containing the fragmented story of her life, metaphorically compare to the aimless drifting and soul-searching that seemed to dominate the seventies. The unparalleled success of Alex Haley's novel Roots, transformed by ABC into a mini-series watched by over 130

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[56]It may be that the only witness to the murders of Nicole Brown and Ronald Goldman was a dog whose barking alerted neighbors to the crime.

million Americans in 1977, and the national excitement over the nation's bicentennial overwhelmingly confirmed America's "yearn[ing] for connection" (Carroll, It Seemed Like Nothing Happened 297-299). Guare, however, makes the point that while the past should be honored, the past can never be retrieved or changed.

Betty never learns the whole truth about her son's life and death as a criminal. Guare makes sure the audience understands that Betty will not be told the complete story. As the play's narrator, Rosalie prefaces the first Bert scene by explaining to the audience:

> This scene you are about to see contains information completely unknown to the boy's mother, my sister. Information unknown to Captain Marvin Holahan of the Sixth Precinct Homicide. Those two people in the course of their lives never learned the information you are about to receive right now (16-17).

Guare keeps Bert's involvement with the gang a secret from Betty not to promote the futility of her search for truth, but to force Betty to accept the past and get on with the business of the present. Betty describes her confusion regarding the puzzle of Bert's death in the following:

> I got on the bus this morning and I started writing on little pieces of paper everything I ever knew. Everything that ever happened to me. Sentences. Places. People's names. Secrets. Things I wanted to be. I thought maybe out of all that I'd find the magic clue to who killed my kid. I'd say I see (55).

Guare suggests that very often things happen in life that defy explanation. Betty seems to understand that finding an answer to the deaths of Bert, Rosalie, and

Raulito is unlikely. Betty continues to believe that the universe is an ordered mechanism, though there may be limits to what one can understand:

> Someday I'll be walking along a beach and the bottle containing the message for me will wash up . . . and I'll know all I need to know . . . I'll remember I had a boy like I remember I once had a mother and once had a father and I'll try to keep piling the weight on to the present, so I'll stay alive and won't slide back. If I don't know, somebody knows. My life is a triumph of all the things I don't know (55).

By casting her own bottles into the water, Betty resigns herself to a sort of mystical and stoical acceptance of what happened to her family. Betty lets go of her need to have the past explained and then decides to go on living.[57]

Despite Betty's failure to make contact, Guare appears to believe in the importance of the larger, extended family. Betty abandons Bert in the city, but society bears the ultimate responsibility for Bert's death. Rosalie describes Bert's murder as a sort of ritual entree to a new family:

> And all the dead people . . . me, Raulito, Durwood, the Dope King of Providence, Mavis Brennan, the man on the ten-speed bike, all the dead people in our lives join together and lead Donny to the wrench and put his hands around the wrench and lead the wrench to Bert's

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[57]Betty's solitary journey of self-discovery compares to Jane Alpert's "conversion to feminism as a journey through inner space" (Kennedy, Platforms 89). Alpert writes, "The struggle to define oneself for oneself ultimately takes place in a realm of the mind in which one is always alone and unsupported" (Qtd. from an essay in Ms. in Kennedy, Platforms 89). Like Alpert, Betty defined herself for herself, alone and unsupported. Like many people in the seventies, Betty becomes her own solitary family.

> head and we hold Bert's head so Donny can bring the wrench down onto Bert's head with greater ease (50).

Instead of the living, the dead help Bert to escape his desperate yearning for contact into the freedom of death, and Guare reminds the audience that in the seventies the concept of society-as-an-extended-family was being largely ignored.

Despite Rosalie's view that the world represents a prison from which the spirit longs to flee, Guare insinuates that contact and sharing through family may assist people in accepting the baffling nature of human existence. Near the end of the play, Guare repeats part of the plays' initial scene (up to where Holahan removes his disguise), and only at this point does the detective disclose his desire to connect with Betty. Holahan, his very name suggesting the need for connection, i.e. hold-a-hand, confesses to Betty:

> All I know is I know more about you than anyone I know. All those months doing dossiers on you. All disconnected. All disjointed . . . We both have to begin again. Maybe together? (56).

Holahan realizes that the big-shot detective was an empty role that he was playing. The real Holahan wants to make contact with Betty and start a real family.

Betty, then, experiences one last memory. Betty hears the ice cream truck's bells ringing. Rather than run to Durwood, however, Betty turns to "consider" Holahan. After a "long pause," Betty goes to Holahan and the "move turns

into two actors bowing to the audience" (57). Betty and Holahan dissolve as characters and present the audience with the reality that the play has ended. The "move" blurs the transition from the artifice of theatre to reality, marking a shift of responsibility. Guare offers the audience the chance to come their own conclusion about what happens or should happen to Betty and Holahan. Moreover, the "move" demonstrates the subtle ways reality and fantasy often fuse and become indistinguishable in modern society. Surprised by the play's perplexing final moment, the audience may then be forced to confront their own issues of confusion, intimacy and contact. Betty's "move" to Holahan hints that Guare advocates contact and family--but it is only a hint.

Hiding in seclusion, the three protagonists in Bosoms and Neglect seem desperate to make contact but unwilling to face their own problems. The characters variously elude the real world in their apartments, books, therapists' office, or hospital rooms; in this work Guare chiefly reflects on the '70s obsession with psycho-therapy, which often allowed people to avoid taking responsibility for their own lives. Author Tom Wolfe has written on this sort of self-isolation and its contribution to the breakdown of interpersonal relationships. Wolfe writes, "Ordinary people in America were breaking off from conventional society, from family, neighborhood, and community, and

creating worlds of their own" ("The Me Decade" 274). Regarding therapy, specifically, Wolfe asserts:

> Still others decided to go . . . all the way. They plunged straight toward what has become the alchemical dream of the Me Decade. The old alchemical dream was changing base metals into gold. The new alchemical dream is: changing one's personality--remaking, remodeling, elevating, and polishing one's very self . . . and observing, studying, and doting on it. (Me!) ("The Me Decade" 277).

None of the characters in Bosoms and Neglect have ever truly grown up and resolved the unfinished business of childhood. Even though Scooper, Henny, and Deirdre struggle to give meaning to their pasts, throughout much of the play they act like selfish children. Sounding like a spoiled brat, Scooper betrays the real reason he picked up Deirdre when he bluntly admits, "There's no sympathy in a doctor's waiting room. Only me next. Me Next. I picked you up today because I was sad Doctor James was leaving" (33). Despite Scooper's honesty, the revelation confirms his arrested development.

As is the case in Landscape of the Body, Guare focuses on non-traditional family groupings in Bosoms and Neglect, a strategy that highlights the changing family landscape in the seventies. In fact, none of the characters in Bosoms and Neglect have families of their own, and each of the three characters lives alone. Scooper and Deirdre are not married; Henny married late in life and is now the widow of a man she did not love (or even know very well). Rather,

the three characters in Bosoms and Neglect form a sort of reluctant, non-traditional, dysfunctional family united in immaturity and isolation. Describing Doctor James' patients, Scooper comments, "It's like we're all related" (15).

Throughout Bosoms and Neglect, Guare stresses the missing domestic components in his characters' lives to show both the changing structure of the American family in the 1970s and to highlight the pressure brought by the unattainable family ideal. For example, forty year old Scooper blames his isolation on his eighty-three year old mother, Henny. Scooper resents his less than perfect family life and goes so far as to accuse Henny of killing his father. In another of Guare's many comic ironies, Scooper complains that his mother's repeated suicide attempts caused his father's death. Scooper jokes, "He stroked out along the way. One day he just short-circuited while she was eating a light bulb . . . or a knife" (11).

Scooper, however, has idealized the memory of his father. He claims that even though his father could not speak, Scooper could discern a loving message from the twitches of his dying body. Desperately seeking comfort, Scooper remembers that he "felt the right side of his [father's] body answer" him (52). Henny, however, reminds Scooper of his father's true nature: "Your father died

because he drank and he was drunk all the time and then he drank even more and then he died" (44).

In seventies' shows like "Family" and "Eight is Enough," television presented modern families who were inordinately endowed with communication skills and who could solve difficult family issues without professional help. Media authority Sklar writes, "You don't see [the characters] turning often to professionals, as they would, most likely, if their cars needed a tune-up" (Prime-time America 62). Many Americans, consequently, often developed a sort of misguided relationship with their favorite shows; "Viewers gain[ed]" a sense of trust and too heavily relied on a group of fictional characters for advice and counsel (Prime-time America 59).[58] While the openness and acceptance practiced in "Family" and "Eight is Enough" provided viewers with good models for family interrelationships, television's tendency to solve problems in thirty minutes or an hour (problems which in real life might take years to unravel) trivializes the pain and conflict of emotional involvements. Quite simply, shows like "Family" and "Eight is Enough" presented a therapeutic

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[58]Television shows have exhibited power to influence society but sometimes in bizarre ways. Popular culture critic Kennedy tells the story of how the show "Kojak" mistakenly happened to use the real name of a Puerto Rican political association as the name of the terrorist group for one of its episodes. As a result, the "Kojak version of reality won out," because the real-life group was thereafter raided by the FBI (Platforms 84).

ideal that rarely existed in real families. The frustration and confusion presented in the play may be less "satisfying" to an audience, but Bosoms and Neglect more truthfully deals with the problems of family and psychotherapy than do overly tidy television shows.

Illustrating the gap between fantasy and reality, Valerie's children prove a strong dose of reality for Scooper, who fantasizes about starting a new family with Valerie, the wife of his best friend. Like Durwood and Rosalie, Scooper wants nothing to do with his lover's children. The children simply do not fit into Scooper's vision. Scooper even imagines that Valerie remains virginal because she had her children by Caesarean section. Scooper brags to his new girlfriend, Deirdre, "She is still tight like a young girl and you come into her so firm and then suddenly it's like coming into St. Peter's in Rome" (20). Exhibiting little sensitivity for Deirdre's feelings, Scooper describes his grandiose dream of liaison with Valerie:

> Her sister will take the kids. When we get back we'll start looking for a place in Maine. Get out of this neurotic city. Find a beat-up ramshackle house by the sea. Remodel it. Books. Music. Comfort. Valerie says she wants a house like us. Simple on the outside. But inside. Inside! We have this dream of buying up every book in Maine . . . Open the world's greatest bookstore (25).

These dreams never come to fruition as Valerie responds to her maternal guilt and comes to her senses. On the verge of her clandestine elopement, her children come down with

chicken pox, and Valerie decides not to abandon her family.

For Scooper, Valerie represents the ideal "someone" who, he mistakenly believes, could fill his presiding emptiness (and help him realize the ideal family). Consequently, Valerie can be conveniently replaced by any woman who caters to Scooper's needs. When Scooper tells Deirdre of his plans to elope with Valerie, we learn that Scooper has "picked up" Deirdre. Surprisingly, even before Valerie decides not to go with him, Scooper and Deirdre start to make love. Scooper then divulges the powerful influence of his mother and the reason he has "betrayed" Valerie. He confesses:

> And my mother's body bursts open and I'm furious at her for not trusting me enough to tell me two years ago and I see you, beside the books, and I just wanted to connect to you (33).

Scooper's desperate need for contact overrides his sense of devotion and loyalty to Valerie. Whether the woman is Deirdre or Valerie, both represent maternal surrogates who are only invoked to meet Scooper's needs.

Despite frequent concessions to his need for instant gratification, Scooper vainly believes his intellect can deliver him from the pain of his dysfunctional childhood. In typical Freudian fashion, he intellectualizes his condition and blames his blind and cancer-stricken mother for all his woes. Yet Scooper acts more like a scolding parent when he attempts to get his eighty-three year old

mother to admit how she mistreated him. Scooper reproves Henny:

> I don't want you leaving this hospital galloping back to the old evasions . . . Did you show your breast to me . . . to stop me from going? I have to know this (42-43).

Scooper concludes that Henny hid her illness from him until the precise moment he was planning to escape with Valerie. He wants clarity and guarantees, but his anger over the past clouds his judgement. Consequently, Scooper tries to coerce his mother into killing herself. Scooper mistakenly believes that Henny's death will free him from his shame. Scholar Edwin Wilson writes that Scooper is "urging his mother to commit suicide, not so much for her sake but for his: to rid him of her dominance and the guilt he feels because of her" ("A Play That Tries to Get By on Cleverness" 17).

For Deirdre, the true significance of her emotional needs is more difficult to ascertain. Appurtenant to her affinity for fiction and novels, Deirdre chooses to live in fantasy; she makes up stories about her family life. At first, Deirdre tells Scooper her family was killed in a car crash, then she goes on to say that her father lives in a nursing home and that she turned him in to the FBI because he was a member of the Mafia. In the end, Deirdre confesses that her father is a librarian, which--like all her other stories--may or may not be the truth.

In addition, Deirdre projects other fantasies onto outsiders; Doctor James and all of Dr. James' patients thus become her imaginary family. Deirdre reveals how therapy represents an extension of her fantasies when she wonders, "How often do we get to share this magic part of our lives" (19). Deirdre directly states that she, Scooper, Doctor James, and the other patients form a "family:" "That's what we are. We share family secrets" (19). Even before Deirdre met Scooper, Deirdre watched Scooper go into Doctor James' office from her apartment window across the street and imagined sexual encounters with her fellow patient. Despite the fact that she often stood naked in the window, Scooper never noticed her. Deirdre interpreted his unawareness as a rejection. Consequently, Scooper became the composite object of another of Deirdre's fictions. Deirdre admits to Scooper: "You became my father. My lovers. My teachers. My uncles. My bosses. Every man who's ever gone out of his way to ignore me" (29). Like Scooper, Deirdre seems to be enjoying the extravagance of her own suffering.

Indeed, Deirdre understands that neither she nor Scooper is in any hurry to terminate therapy. Deirdre maintains that Scooper refuses to come to terms with his recurring nightmare because the dream contains the "key" that would discontinue Scooper's need for Dr. James as a

father figure. Deirdre, however, brags about the special rates she gets from Dr. James:

> Sometimes he doesn't even charge me. Sometimes he says you are so interesting, I should be giving you money just for the privilege of listening to you pour out your heart (30).

Even though the two seem to quell many of their personal needs in therapeutic transference with Dr. James, neither Scooper nor Deirdre can build real families until they accept the failures of childhood and take responsibility for their own lives. Scooper expresses his unwillingness to release the past through his disgust for his mother's cancer:

> That breast nursed me. Fed me. My first connection. All the time I spend pursuing wombs, hidden under infinities of skirts, entry to that warm darkness, and to see what I'm searching for, hanging there. Light shining on what no light should ever see. This fucking old lady thinks it's her bladder. If I'm conceived out of a bladder, what does that make me? (22).

Scooper may be able to discern his mother's problems, but he has far more difficulty in understanding his own. Commentator Kroll writes, "What Henny has done with her body, Scooper has done with his mind" ("Laugh When It Hurts" 85-86). In other words, Scooper's denial allows his problems to multiply like cancer cells.

Scooper reveals his blindness when he talks about his ongoing affair with Valerie, his best friend's wife. He expresses no guilt or remorse. Moreover, Scooper claims he started therapy as a gift for Valerie, denying any of his

apparent problems. Scooper acknowledges, "She wouldn't continue with me unless I kept up the therapy. I started doing the therapy as a bouquet for her" (21). Overlooking his three days a week of regularly scheduled therapy, Scooper lectures Deirdre about her dependence on Doctor James:

> You're one of those sad neurotics who have to go first thing in the morning just to get enough courage . . . to get through the day . . . You're one of those cripples who can only take life in twenty-four hour doses. Then off to Daddy (31).

According to Guare, Scooper perhaps should confess his own sins, make amends and re-own his resentment (instead of blaming Henny for all his emotional ills).

Scooper's avoidance notwithstanding, Henny did not set a completely admirable example for the creation of a healthy family. Henny married a drunk because she had been spurned by the only man she ever really loved. Once rejected, Henny retreated rather than face the risk of being hurt again. Henny remembers that her compromise was the result of loneliness. Henny concedes, "We were lonely. Is that a sin? To be lonely. My father had died. I was alone" (46).

Henny's cancer, however, symbolizes the danger of hiding from repressed problems. Scooper observes that

> She had so neglected herself that the disease was sick of not being noticed. The disease finally burst through the skin . . . screaming how loud do you have to go to get noticed (9).

Reviewer Kroll surmised that Henny's "epic neglect of her own body is a parody of the creative energy that, implies Guare, people seem to have lost in shaping their lives" ("Laugh When It Hurts" 85-86). Her unwillingness to receive treatment for her cancer, however, suggests that Henny may be playing the role of martyr. In short, Henny derives power from her illness. With such fatal physical consequences, then, Henny's attempt to manipulate may be even more grandiose (and injurious) than Scooper and Deirdre's mind games.

The pair's heavy involvement with psycho-analysis brings to mind the films of Woody Allen, works which according to movie critic Pauline Kael represent "the spirit of the seventies incarnate" ("Vulgarians and Ascetics" Qtd. in Schapiro 47). (Allen's Annie Hall won the Academy Awards for Best Picture and Best Director in 1977.) Closing after only four performances on Broadway, Bosoms and Neglect did not achieve the impact or popularity of Annie Hall; nonetheless, the play favorably compares with Allen's portrayal of seventies' narcissism. The Los Angeles Times even went so far as to describe Bosoms and Neglect as "hysterically funny, abrasive, over-aware in the Woody Allen manner, shocking and non-stop"(31).[59] It is

[59]The reception of Woody Allen's film, Stardust Memories (1980)reveals a problem which may also have plagued Bosoms and Neglect. Film scholar Schapiro notes that light-hearted humor is essential to the success of works which deploy neurotic behavior as a central feature.

curious that film critic Barbara Schapiro describes the major themes of Allen's movies as follows:

> All reveal an obsessive fear of death, of fragmentation and self-disintegration, an alternation of idealized, grandiose self fantasies with expressions of contemptuous self-deprecation, and a similar alternating idealization and contempt for women (47).

Certainly, Scooper reveals himself to be a worthy Allen-type character, for Scooper exhibits all of the above "symptoms" in Bosoms and Neglect. The character hates his mother, seeks an admission of abuse, and wishes for Henny to die and disappear. Scooper paradoxically worships Valerie or any other women who might make a "better" mother. In words that could echo those of Allen's character in Annie Hall, Scooper's describes how he, Valerie, and Ted wound up in therapy:

> She was so unhappy over our affair and guilty that her husband began to feel guilty because he didn't know about our affair and started blaming himself for her grief, so he went into therapy and he was in one group and asked her to join him in his group but she was already in another group and she wanted me to join the group her husband was in and then she'd join too, and I said I did not think that was a good idea . . . I said I'll go to Doctor James for you, but no group analysis (21).

Scooper and Deirdre engage in fights that resemble the warfare of selfish two-year old brats. At one point, Scooper and Deirdre immerse themselves in a long debate

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Schapiro writes that "Without humor, a film like Stardust Memories collapses into a private and feeble narcissistic fantasy, vacillating between contemptuous arrogance and bitter self-pity" (61). According to some critics, Bosoms and Neglect suffered from similar deficiencies.

over which one of them is the better and more important patient. Deirdre claims that, "He [Dr. James] reads to [her] from the Secret Freud Handbook" (31). Scooper replies, "He has you first just to get the worst out of the way" (31). The two endlessly banter on in immature fashion, trying to gain the psychological upper hand. When they deplete such ammunition, they attack other forms of therapy and even other patients. For instance, Scooper criticizes Ted, Valerie's husband, for being "so dependent" on group therapy: "Poor weak . . . don't get me started on Ted" (25). Later Scooper entices Deirdre into a knife fight. While stabbing, ripping and throwing books out the window, Scooper screams, "I wish I were blind! And illiterate! I wish I could rip all the sight out of my head" (38). Attempting to protect her books, Deirdre repeatedly stabs Scooper.[60]

In addition to revealing the childish natures of the characters, the battle over the books represents a struggle to safeguard one of their mechanisms of escape. Books allow Scooper and Deirdre to use words as buffers; literature lends structure and meaning to their lives. Not surprisingly, Scooper prefers to imagine himself as a perfectly composed book. Scooper tells Henny that he

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[60]Humorously, the fight momentarily stops when Scooper and Deirdre spot Dr. James sneaking away for his dreaded vacation. Once Dr. James has gone, however, Scooper and Deirdre resume the battle.

avoids her because she is "all chaos." He acknowledges:

> I need my life structured, enclosed. I pick up a book. The page's rectangular shape, obvious but important, constant from book to book, dependable, the passion, wisdom, excitement captured in the center of the page tamed by the white margin. I lie on the rectangular couch of Dr. James and yes I become the words on the page. I can face my dreams (52).

We find that, according to Scooper, he portrays himself as a "neglected masterpiece" (27). Scooper concedes: "I bring my life to Doctor James . . . until I am as fictional to myself as any one of these books are to me" (38). Deirdre describes her relationship with the therapist in the same metaphorical manner; Deirdre admits:

> I even think of Doctor James as a literary experience. Before Doctor James, my life was pages spilled all over the floor. Grim. Violent. Aimless. He's edited my life into a novel I am so proud to be a part of. Jane Austen (20-21).

Not only do books provide a metaphor for escape from real experience into fantasy, books in Bosoms and Neglect serve to mask the issue of neglect. Though still draped in her own lie about her father being in the nursing home, Deirdre correctly analyzes her and Scooper's problem: "We both share a guilt about the way we neglected a parent" (33). In other words, all their conversations about "neglected masterpieces," are, in actuality, deflections of their own culpability.

Early in the play, Deirdre and Scooper quote Joseph Conrad, one of the many authors mentioned in the piece. In Chance, Conrad wrote:

> If two beings thrown together, mutually attract . . . voluntarily stop short of the embrace, they are committing a sin against life. The call of which is simple. Perhaps sacred (27).

In Bosoms and Neglect, Guare uses Conrad to affirm the importance of reaching out, of facilitating human engagement (even though the characters' obsession with books removes them from experience). At the end of the play, stage directions indicate that Henny "passionately reaches her hand out to her son, trying to make that connection" (62). After a pause, Henny invokes Scooper by his given name, calling out for "James." Having already departed, Scooper misses his chance to make contact with his mother, in effect, to grow up and finish his childhood. Scooper's impulsive flight with Deirdre (to find Doctor James), leaves one to conclude that Guare agrees with Wolfe's censure of the analysis business and its boom in the "Me Decade."[61] Bosoms and Neglect suggests that such egocentric behavior may have contributed more confusion and pain than healing--impeding the process and the construction and growth of new healthy families.

Scooper, Henny, and Deirdre share a common need for family and contact, but each seems incapable of reaching

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[61]Scholar Peter Clecak represents one of a seeming minority who contends that social critics have mistakenly emphasized seventies' "perversions of the idea of personal fulfillment" and overlooked the many benefits of the national trend toward self-examination, which include an enhanced appreciation of cultural diversity as well as the "celebration" of the "democratization of personhood and the thickening of individuality" (2).

out to others in any healthy way. Henny gets cancer, Scooper seduces women, Deirdre lives in a world of lies, but all three continue to pursue the illusion of fantasy and idealism. Moreover, all three easily diagnose each other's problems, while failing to take control of their own lives. Scooper reports how Henny "begged us to lie to her . . . As soon as she went blind, her mind snapped back into place" (11). Deirdre remarks how Henny's isolation revealed an enduring fear of contact. Deirdre notes: "Poor tragic lady . . . Not trusting any human being enough to reach out" (11). While Henny hides out in her apartment, unmindful of the world and her cancer, she compares Scooper to an ostrich who hides his head in the sand (56). Columnist Kroll writes that the trio in Bosoms and Neglect are reaching for some "spiritual medicare" that will salvage their quests for life and love ("Laugh When It Hurts" 86). At the end of the play, however, the cycle of avoidance continues.

Scooper does not listen to his mother and continues to manipulate women in his effort to fill his emotional void. Because of Deirdre's emotional needs, Scooper can keep playing the adult role of being Deirdre's surrogate father while receiving Deirdre's "mothering" nurture in his other role as the resentful child. Scooper and Deirdre leave Henny alone to speak the truth about family and connection.

To an empty room, Henny tells the story that would indeed "clarify all."

Though Bosoms and Neglect ends with Scooper's departure, Guare sounds more hopeful notes in Landscape of the Body. Rosalie's song, "Hey, stay a while" (although performed in the style of a nightclub stripper), expresses the importance of contact. Rosalie sings, "Look in my arms and you'll see Home Sweet Home . . . My arms are filled with what the whole world lacks" (16). The shampoo scene between Bert and Betty further elaborates on the ways human touch can bring people together, break down resistances, and encourage openness and sharing.[62] As Bert shampoos her hair, Betty relaxes and begins to share some of her secrets--how she comforted her friend Mavis in the hospital by reading aloud The Sensuous Woman. Betty describes the horror and sadness of her meetings with Mavis in the hospital:

> And her gums were black and her breath smelled like sulfur and her hair was gone and I'm reading her how to attract a man and she's smiling and hanging on. I never went back after one day. I couldn't go back (40).

Betty abandoned Mavis just as she abandoned Bert. Guare, however, uses Betty's inability to face pain, death, and reality to define the purpose of family. When Betty comforted Mavis in the hospital, they were a true family.

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[62]Theatre critic Douglas Watt dismissed the shampoo scene as "theatrical juvenalia" ("Mishmash of a Play" 150).

When Betty was sharing the pain and regret of her memory about Mavis with her son, she and Bert were a true family. Like Scooper in Bosoms and Neglect, Betty misses her opportunity to connect. Indeed, Bert's murder stresses the paramount importance and need for what family could and should provide for children. In Landscape of the Body, however, Betty seems to come to terms with her failure and accept (if unhappily) the uncertainty of the future. Scooper, on the other hand, sneaks away with Deirdre (as the stage directions indicate) to "fulfill his Conradian destiny--at least for a while" (61).

While Guare seems to take a highly critical stance with regard to the family's status in America of the '70s, he also clarifies the purpose and definition of family. Guare describes the family as a vehicle which should--even though anger and resentment often eclipse intimacy--encourage contact and connection. The family should provide sanctuary in an ever-changing and confusing world. Though the two plays exhibit stylistic differences, Landscape of the Body and Bosoms and Neglect complement each other in theme. Landscape of the Body accents the social forces that bear on family issues at large, while Bosoms and Neglect exposes the family members' inner, and usually more secretive, struggle to resolve psychological issues. The works demonstrate Guare's belief in the importance of connection within the home, but also reveal

the complex array of problems which worked to erode the foundations of the family (America's primary social unit) during the decline and malaise of the 1970s.

CHAPTER 4:

THE SEARCH FOR FULFILLMENT AND THE AMERICAN NATIONAL IDENTITY: MARCO POLO SINGS A SOLO AND THE LYDIE BREEZE TETRALOGY

Just as Americans struggled to come to terms with changes in the structure of the American family in the late seventies, so too did Americans in this time grapple with accepting America's declining political prestige and power on the world scene. Seemingly unable to recover from defeat in Vietnam, American foreign policy in the late seventies epitomized weakness and ineptitude rather than leadership and strength (Krieger 130). Facing economic and political coercion from the likes of Ayatollah Khomeini, Americans not only began to realize the limits of American authority on the world stage but also began to understand how foreign governments could negatively impact the American way of life at home.

Failures in foreign affairs only exacerbated the country's mounting domestic problems, such as inflation and decreasing productivity. Historian Nicholas Lemann recounts how the sudden rise of gasoline prices during the Carter administration shocked Americans into the realization that the U.S. was no longer exempt from the problems which had existed in Europe and around the world since World War II (46). Lemann writes, "Inflation was well above 10 percent and rising, and suddenly what seemed like a quarter of every day was spent on getting gasoline

or thinking about getting gasoline" (46). Moreover, the dramatic near-meltdown at the Three Mile Island nuclear plant in 1979 signaled a crisis of confidence in American technology and the country's ability to solve its energy needs (Gilbert 309). As some critics observed, the American dream seemed to be crumbling with "dizzying speed, bringing fear, resentment, and a widespread demand" to get the country back on track (Kuhre 34).

Yet when the economic and political problems of the late seventies triggered an invocation to individualism (and the hope of recovering a lost feature of our national character), the effect was that of augmented self-interest (Lemann 48). Indeed, Congressman Tom Hayden portrayed Americans of this period as "trading vision for consumer effort," lacking "any clear philosophy that can inspire a majority of Americans to any endeavor requiring personal sacrifice for a larger purpose" (The American Future 11). Instead of taking the hard path outlined by Carter's famous "crisis of confidence" speech, which advocated sacrifice and conservation as a continuing way of life, Americans responded with anger, frustration and resentment. Many blamed Carter himself and refused to accept the country's declining position in the world as the new, inevitable reality (Krieger 138).

Frustrated Americans embraced instead the political nostalgia and "mythic vision" of Republican Presidential

candidate Ronald Reagan, who promised to "make old dreams come true once again" (Combs 140); Reagan's campaign proclaimed "It's Morning in America" (Miller 341-342). While Carter lamented the state of the American spirit, Reagan addressed the fears of ordinary people who longed for a return to the "good old days" (Krieger 136). Scholar Joel Krieger reports that President Carter "acknowledged . . . the lack of confidence in the future, [and] the fear of 'paralysis and stagnation and drift'" (4). When announcing his candidacy for President, however, Reagan took the opposite approach:

> To me our country is a living, breathing presence, unimpressed by what others say is impossible, proud of its success, generous . . . always impatient to provide a better life for its people in a framework of basic fairness (Qtd. in Miller 342).

Though Carter's appraisal of America's diminished role in a rapidly changing world may have been accurate, many in the late seventies did not like the idea of a "scaled-back America" (Lemann 49). Consequently, Americans rejected notions that the great American dream had expired and that the frontier spirit had disappeared; Carter was summarily booted out of office. Carter may have been more honest, but Reagan told the American people what they wanted to hear. In other words, Reagan reassured Americans that the country was in no state of decline, and that the upheavals of the sixties and seventies were only an aberration.

According to many accounts, the eighties unfolded as a decade of "greed and plunder;" the problems of the seventies by and large were ignored or swept under the carpet (Miller 345). Under Reagan, the country embraced the "utopian ideology of laissez-faire capitalism" in an attempt to re-establish the pre-eminence of America's birthright frontier spirit. By 1985, pop-artist Madonna scored a major hit with her single, "Material Girl," a tune that satirically mimicked the selfishness of the times (Gustaitis 52). As the new cowboy marshaling over the range, the President gave Americans permission to spend themselves back into "feeling good."[63]

Even though the Reagan presidency ran up enormous public debt and entertained graft and corruption on a scale comparable to the administrations of Grant, Harding and Nixon, Reagan could easily have been elected to a third term had the law allowed him to run again (Miller 341). Whereas the Watergate scandal had toppled the Nixon Presidency, creating a highly suspicious public, inspiring the press to new heights of investigative adversarialism, the Irangate scandal inflicted only temporary damage on Reagan's political stature; he became known as the "Teflon" President (Miller 342).

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[63]Reagan's rhetoric of materialism also often encouraged a negative portrayal of the "have-nots" in American society as enemies of the American dream (West 48).

Reagan's political success lay in his ability to embody and symbolize American national unity, and his persona itself served as "something like the flag, or the Queen of England" (Chomsky 5). Reagan's popularity in large part issued from Americans' need to believe in what Reagan represented. As political commentator James Combs suggests, Reagan "presided over the celebration of an imaginary country . . . [which] casts American life in the romantic mode of the personal" (The Reagan Range 133-134). Under Reagan, the good old days were as close at hand as the consumer's nearest credit card or military base. Combs describes Reagan's political acumen in succinct terms, as a "historical defense, a social veneer of mythic protection from the relentlessness of change" (140).

His reputation as the "Great Communicator" notwithstanding, Reagan may have been more a product of years of media influence than pure political master. Not only was Reagan the Governor of California, the state which exemplifies the idealized notion of the gold-laden frontier, but he was also a Hollywood actor who had portrayed American stereotypical heroes in numerous movies. Political theorist Michael Rogin argues that Reagan was simply the image of a political leader: " a naturalized fantasy . . . whose most spontaneous [and popular] moments . . . turn[ed] out to be lines from old movies" (Ronald Reagan, the Movie 36). Reagan's immense popularity

and seeming invincibility demonstrate the power of the media to "transform both our daydreams and our nightmares into patterns of wishful identity" (Umphlett 9). Reagan's "performance" as President, then, worked to "dissolve the boundaries between film and real life" (Rogin 4).[64] Rather than solve the myriad problems leftover from the seventies, Americans in the eighties put an actor in the White House and delved deeper into their fantasies about the good old days. In the person and "image" of Reagan, the national identity became even more romanticized and removed from realistic pursuits.

Against the backdrop of Reagan's America, the focus of Chapter 4 concerns Guare's vision of national identity and its relation to issues of personal fulfillment prevalent in the late seventies and early eighties. Marco Polo Sings a Solo (1976) and the three plays of the Lydie Breeze Tetralogy (1982 & 1984) explore how the American dream affects the individual and, conversely, how the individual affects the American dream. Insomuch as the Lydie Breeze plays tell one epic story, the chapter will treat the tetralogy as a single work.

In these plays, Guare exhibits a keen intuition of the fears and misgivings that many Americans experienced about

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[64]Reagan, himself, seems to have had great difficulty keeping track of his own identity and reality. He mistakenly referred to his dog as "Lassie" in front of reporters and was often convinced that fictional events from his movies were factual history (Rogin 7-8).

the future of the nation in the late seventies. Marco Polo Sings a Solo examines several concerns of the decade, i.e. narcissism, technology, scarcity, and the media. In the works of this time, Guare also dramatizes America's need for a sanitized mythic history as evidenced during the Reagan years. In the Lydie Breeze plays, Women and Water, Gardenia, and Lydie Breeze, Guare exposes the notion of a glorified American past and illustrates how political idealism inevitably leads to corruption.[65] In the tetralogy, Guare reminds Americans that surges of nationalism, like that which appeared at the end of the seventies

> attempt to create a version of history for themselves, in which their intrinsic essence has always manifested itself, thereby producing readings of the past that are as monolithic as that which they are trying to suppress (Deane 9).

Both the Lydie Breeze plays and Marco Polo Sings a Solo invite Americans to face the truth about the nation and to live in the present. Guare urges a rejection of sentimentalizing the past and abstinence from catastrophic fantasies about the future. The Lydie Breeze plays challenge America to learn the dangers of utopian idealism. On the other hand, Marco Polo Sings a Solo signals a comedic and prophetic warning about living outside "limits" and outside community (Marco Polo Sings a Solo 4). By

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[65]The fourth play of the tetralogy, Bullfinch's Mythology, has yet to be released by the playwright.

portraying some of the darker aspects of the nation's heritage, Guare offers a more honest evaluation of American culture than does the Reagan version of the idyllic American frontier. Collectively, the plays demonstrate that the frontier ethic and the American dream can be exploited to promote selfish and immoderate goals, ones that lead to isolation, greed and individualism.

By focusing on the tension between public responsibility and private pursuits, Guare adopts the view, often featured in the works of Henrik Ibsen, that public and private concerns are inexorably entwined. Guare seeks to unravel the complexities of American identity by issuing a call for individual regeneration. Guare argues that our national sense of self should not be based on the accumulation of wealth and power but the potential for honest self-examination and candor. To borrow a phrase, Marco Polo Sings a Solo and the Lydie Breeze plays are treatises on the American "self writ large," efforts that call for national unity through the acknowledgment of America's collective capacity for weakness, suffering and corruptibility (Kennealy 149).

Marco Polo Sings a Solo stands as Guare's response to the "complete obsession with self" of the late seventies, and in Guare's futuristic play this element has taken drastic proportions (Marco Polo Sings a Solo 4; Dasgupta 49). According to many critics, the late seventies tended

to accentuate these aspects of the American dream which championed individual pursuits to the exclusion of the communal good. Describing the need for a healthy balance in American society between individual and community goals, social theorists Robert Bellah, Richard Madsen, William M. Sullivan, Ann Swidler, and Stephen M. Tipton insist that excessive individualism stymies one's ability to "articulate" the community's "vocabulary of values" (Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life (1985) Qtd. in Wilkinson 283). Individual and community pursuits, then, represent polar extremes of the American dream. In other words, if national values drift too far toward individual or community, then, American culture and society are poorly served (283).[66]

Guare seems to share view of Bellah and his colleagues on the American dream and its Janus-like nature, which yokes "the deep desire for autonomy and self-reliance . . . with an equally deep conviction that life has no meaning unless shared with others in the context of community" (Habits of the Heart Qtd. in

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[66] In the fifties, Whyte focused on the opposite effect of social pressures that effected the Puritan ethic of individual "self-reliance." In The Organization Man (1956), Whyte criticized the hazards of total devotion to the "organization" which result in robotic conformity in the business world rather than efficiency and excellence (Qtd. in Wilkinson 4-5). Nonetheless, Whyte represents an example of how social critics continually seek to untangle the duality of the ever-evolving American dream by citing the need for balance between individual and community issues.

Wilkinson 283). In Marco Polo Sings a Solo, however, Guare advances such contentions in negative fashion by creating a not-so-distant future (1999) inhabited by individuals who completely disavow any interest in the common good.

In his author's notes, which accompany the acting edition of the text, Guare comments on the play's future setting and the loss of balance and perspective experienced by the characters:

> The end of a century is traditionally a time of despair and soul-searching . . . These people are at a brink. What makes them noble is they really do want the best. What makes this a comedy is how lazy and satisfied they are (Marco Polo Sings a Solo 4).

Epitomizing the "failures of the twentieth century," Guare provides the eight characters in Marco Polo Sings a Solo the opportunity for redemption and a new beginning in the twenty-first century. The salvation of such characters lies in their ability to "let go of themselves" and their selfish interest in their opportunities for greatness (4). As the sole possessor of the cure for cancer, Tom utilizes the formula as a means to attain the power and prestige of U.S. presidency but not to heal mankind. By losing the cure, Tom joins Wrong Way Corrigan and Benedict Arnold in the American vocabulary as the latest "byword for asshole" (45-46). Like Tom, almost all other characters of the egocentric order refuse to stop singing their various "solos" (4).

Stony is the only character who seems to have the whole of society in mind. Despite the fact that he identifies with vegetables to the point of neurosis, Stony ponders the future of science and holds that vegetable research (aimed at ending world hunger) "never go[es] far enough" (16). Stony maintains, "We have to keep pushing ourselves further and further to recognizing the needs of others" (16). Unlike Tom, the opportunistic politician, Stony reveals a genuine desire to help the planet, an impulse that helps him understand himself.

In addition to the futuristic setting of Marco Polo Sings a Solo, Guare makes the odd choice of locating the play's action on an iceberg in Norway. Guare's rather extreme choice, however, emphasizes how far afield the characters have gone in search of the American dream. The iceberg provides few identifiable American icons; it thus suggests an American future that may be confusing and, therefore, disturbing to the audience of the seventies.

Although Tom seeks the presidency of the United States, nothing about Marco Polo Sings a Solo seems overtly or traditionally American. Indeed, rather than make a movie about an American hero, Stony chooses Marco Polo, a representative of thirteenth century Venice, not "main street USA." Grieg's piano appears on stage, and there is talk of Ibsen, Jung, and Hitler's love letters; the closest we get to bona-fide Americana are references to Mrs.

McBride's past as the first flower child of the sixties. Guare avoids American iconography for the purpose of defamiliarization. Forced to wonder what these characters have to do with the American future, the audience may discover that America of the contemporary moment bears a similar lack of resemblance to the traditional idea of America. Theatre critic Michael Feingold argues that Guare's characters have become frozen in place, unable to move. Feingold asserts:

> The end is stasis, an emotional icing over that reflects the ice palace setting. The characters wait, frozen, for the new century, wondering if they have actually lived through any of this one ("Freeze-Dried Despair" 43).

The relevance of the play's setting and its emphasis on technology relates to what theorist Michael Novak calls the issue of "mastery" (Unmeltable Ethnics 95). Novak observes that part of the American dream invokes the "duty" to explore and conquer the frontier. Novak contends, to be truly American one must answer the call "to master a continent, to conquer nature, to bring outer space within his purview, to sell light bulbs to India, to send his institutions of personal freedom" throughout the world (95). With the exception of hawking light bulbs to India, Marco Polo Sings a Solo addresses each of the points noted in Novak's assessment.

In Guare's version of the future, technology and egocentrism have run amok and thus disfigure the American

dream. In the opening scene of the play Diane tells the story of the Shootselfs who re-enacted their marriage vows because they no longer knew each other; numerous plastic surgeries had rendered them unrecognizable. Within the play, the Shootselfs represent an "inseparable couple that sums up" their age (12). The fact that the pair are named the Shootselfs metaphorically reflects their self-destructive tendencies. Diane summarizes the couple's abuse of plastic surgery:

> Last year, didn't Stephanie have her entire body relifted? Flying from Palm Springs to Palm Beach the altitude unraveled the stitches. The silicone zinged out. The whole new ass falls off. Broke the stewardess's foot. They had to turn the plane back. Put her ass in intensive care. I've heard of having your ass in a sling, but in this year of 1999 Stephanie carried it a little too far (6).

Diane, however, seems no less vain than the Shootselfs. Later, she asks Larry, her hopelessly ardent (and legless) suitor, if the doctors can put a phone in his prothesis so she can call him whenever she wants. Larry gleefully answers, "I could have hot plates on the knee caps. Whip up a souffle. Plug in for a cup of coffee. Hot and cold running water" (31). While both comments drip with sarcasm, the nature of Larry's relentless pursuit of Diane makes one wonder just how far he is willing to go.

An even more self-indulgent use of technology concerns Stony's mother, a transsexual who impregnated herself with her/his own sperm (saved from when Mrs. McBride was a man named Elliot) (Clark 57). In short, Stony's mother is also

Stony's father. Mrs. McBride tells her son, "You're all me. Everything about you is me. I filled your head with great men because you are like the first person born out of Twenty-first Century technology" (25).[67] By 1999, the intrusion of science into the realm of the human is complete. It is little wonder, then, that Stony wants to become "an astronaut himself to escape to the brave new world" away from the horrors of technological incest (Clark 57).

The characters who inhabit the world of Marco Polo Sings a Solo also use technology to dominate the plant and animal kingdoms (for fetishistic purposes). Tom has a friend who lobotomizes leopards, gives them the vocal cords of humming birds, then replaces their tails with snakes. Seemingly enamored of the process, Diane muses: "Quite striking . . . When evolution takes a turn beauty must be included" (33).[68] The tortures of technology in Marco Polo Sings a Solo also strike hard at vegetables. Stony demonstrates for the audience the inordinate suffering vegetables undergo in service to research:

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[67]Guare may be reacting to the fact that the first test-tube baby was "created" in 1977, the year of the premiere of Marco Polo Sings a Solo in New York (Gustaitis 44).

[68]There are many examples of endangered species, like tigers, rhinoceros, and elephants, today whose populations continue to dwindle as a result of black market activity that caters to other materialistic indulgences that ascribe magical properties to animal body parts.

> Have you ever heard the cries of the asparagus? (*Stony presses a button. Agonizing screams are heard.*) Granted zucchinis are dumb. (*Moans are heard.*) But radishes are brilliant. (*More squeals.*) (16).

Frank's attempt to impregnate his wife from outer space, however, exposes the limits of self-serving technology. Skippy, Frank's wife, will be the new "technological madonna" and Frank will be the new "technological messiah" (37). When the wife refuses to let the Marines place a metal disc in her uterus (and runs away), Frank responds with immaturity:

> The child was supposed to be born in the White House. You're so goddam selfish. I'd splash down New Year's Eve as 1999 becomes 2000. You'd present me with the perfect child. Give the world new dreams. Give the world new legends (21).

Apparently, the technological American dream would allow children to be conceived without human contact. Fathers would be able to transmit their sperm back home while exploring outer space.

According to Guare, however, the implications of this new technology are more destructive than beneficent. When Frank shoots his sperm through space (in powerful "zaps" of lightning), he ineptly misfires and ends up destroying most of Norway. Franks's new child, born full grown and perfect, thanks to "nuclear transformers," responds by citing his father's corruption and immediately kills himself; he jumps off a cliff with a group of determined lemmings (42). As Frank recounts his son's suicide, Mrs.

McBride enters the scene carrying a "frozen flamingo" (42). Mrs. McBride voices the playwright's vision when she states: "I don't know much about symbols, but I'd say when frozen flamingoes fall out of the sky, good times are not in store" (42). Guare deploys the flamingo as a satirical omen, which warns that indiscriminate abuse of technology may have far-reaching consequences.

In the world of Marco Polo Sings a Solo, technology has conquered the frontier on almost every front. Frank has, in fact, discovered a new green planet that will solve the earth's hunger problem forever (17). However, for these characters, technological supremacy has brought boredom and complacency. Indeed, Marco Polo Sings a Solo may present the technological "dead end of the twentieth century" (Feingold, "Freeze-Dried Despair" 42). As Guare submits, the very fact that characters have no limits and are totally free makes them "terrified" (Marco Polo Sings a Solo 4). "Whether it be a chemical formula to end cancer or a film to ennoble the world or a love to hang onto at night," the characters in Marco Polo Sings a Solo make preposterous and inappropriate choices in their search of fulfillment (4). According to critic Feingold, Marco Polo Sings a Solo chronicles the characters' desperate pursuits of their selfish technological "obsessions" (43).

This dynamic appears throughout the play. The reason Elliot (Mrs. McBride) went in for the sex change operation

was because he was in love with Lusty. However, the alteration proved unnecessary and damning. On their wedding night, Lusty confessed to Mrs. McBride that the only reason Lusty married her was because she was "the spitting image of [her] brother [Elliot] . . . The only man [he] ever loved that [he] could not have" (23). The marriage between Lusty and Mrs. McBride reflects a denial of reality and fails because neither person accepted the truth of their feelings. Had Elliot been more honest and Lusty more open about his homosexuality, the two might have made contact (without the aid of major surgery). As the progeny of Mrs. McBride's narcissistic sex change, Stony searches for his roots, for his identity, and for the larger meaning to his life. He also regards his country in a more idealistic fashion than the other characters in the play. Indeed, Stony's quest for understanding informs the central structural feature of the Marco Polo Sings a Solo. For Stony, his Marco Polo movie is geared to "help the audience recuperate from the entire 20th century" (8). Stony's outlook is also suggested in his designation of Marco Polo himself upon his return home after his frontier adventures. Stony reflects:

> Wandering through all these new worlds. He's seen so much . . . But he has nothing of his own. He wants to change his life . . . He stands there emptied. Home. Changed. Ready to begin again. Hello (7).

Like the hero of his movie, Stony seeks the meaning of his own epic journey through life. Stony, however, seems to

find none of the treasures procured and enjoyed by his "American" hero, Marco Polo.

Stony's frequent ventures in space, however, have more to do with travels in "mythic space" than with outer space itself. For scholar Richard Slotkin, the frontier provides such a "mythic space," where the "fears, wishes, expectations, exaggerations and ultimately frustrations" of those lured into the frontiers' "jingoistic-induced" fantasies cohere (The Fatal Environment Qtd. in Ben-Zvi, 217). Like such seventies' movies as Outland and Star Wars, which translate the heroism of the American west into new realms, Guare dramatizes his American story (and its corruption) in the deep recesses of space.

Stony originally sees himself in his hero, Frank, the renowned space traveler. Having been conceived like no other person in history, Stony disowns his adoptive past and its attendant sense of dissociation. He proclaims, "I can invent myself. I am Frank Schaeffer" (18). However, when Stony emulates his hero and travels to the new green planet, Stony discovers to his amazement that the planet has transformed itself into a world populated with millions of replicas of himself. Though pleased at first, Stony eventually recoils in horror:

> Me! Me! Each me ignoring the other me. Each one moaning, whining Me! This is not the me I had planned to be . . . All I see are these mes. I take an axe. I slash the plants. I stomp on the roots. I take a gun. I shoot all the mes. I take flame. I burn the

> new planet. I don't care. I want these mes out of me (43).

Instead of ameliorating his narcissistic impulses, this experience reveals for Stony the emptiness of selfish pursuits.

Desperate to escape the unexpected horror of the green planet and eager to find some sense of community, Stony "flies" home to earth. Stony, however, returns to Norway to learn that his cast and crew have deserted him, that his wife has left him, and that his father is dead. Stony turns to his hero, Frank, for answers. Frank reassures Stony that the green planet will grow back. Moreover, according to Frank, the planet reveals people's true selves. In other words, Stony travels to the far reaches of outer space to confront his need for community. For Frank, however, his encounter with the planet brings no self-illumination. After Stony departs (in his somewhat enlightened despair), Frank muses on his options:

> Should I go back into space and become a hero or stay here and try to win Skippy back? The world on one hand. Me on the other. The world. Me. The World. Me (44).

However, for Guare, Stony's new awareness may lead him to what psychologist Erich Fromm has termed the "authentic self," a self freed from social pressures and constraints (Qtd. in Wilkinson 12). Stony knows that his encounter with the green planet has changed him forever. He concludes:

> I have killed me. I want no more solos. I crave duets. The joy of a trio. The harmony of a quartet. The totality of an orchestra. Home. I head for home. Duets! Trios! A quartet! Yes, even an orchestra" (43).

In essence, the new planet has led Stony to reclaim his place in the world community; he relinquishes his role as a solitary explorer, and unlike Frank, eschews the selfish dreams of stardom.

Marco Polo Sings a Solo demonstrates that technology and narcissism make a deadly combination. According to Guare, the answer to the social ills of the seventies may lie in an understanding of contact and community. At the end of the play, when all of Stony's compatriots stand frozen with champagne glasses raised high, Stony in effect offers Guare's toast to the new millennium. Stony puzzles over whether he should leave his friends and hide in space or return to the life of humans (and its imperfections). Against the backdrop of the many selfish dreamers, Stony directly addresses the audience:

> I realized what I had to do. What I would have to do. Descend to earth. Remove my helmet. Draw the curtain. Say Goodby forever. Take my son. Go out into the now. Out there where you live. Into the present. Out there where you are now. Grow. Change. My plant nature. Our plant nature. I celebrate that (51).

Relinquishing his "superman" dreams, Stony chooses to return to earth, live in the moment and, in simple terms, grow some roots.[69]

As in Landscape of the Body and Bosoms and Neglect, Guare ends Marco Polo Sings a Solo with a plea for contact, for the acceptance of reality, and the dismissal of that "fictive" frontier which elicits mythological quests (Slotkin, The Fatal Environment Qtd. in Ben-Zvi 217). Guare, in agreement with the views of Slotkin, asserts that fulfillment in America means letting go of those selfish and exploitive fantasies typically associated with the American frontier. The American identity should not be equated with conquest but with the notion of contact and community. Since Marco Polo Sings a Solo presents a fantasy of the future, Guare offers the audience the occasion to reflect upon the history of the moment and to learn from the history that might one day be.

If the characters of Marco Polo Sings a Solo seem to share nothing save a creed of self-obsession, Guare takes the opposite approach in the Lydie Breeze Tetralogy. As theatre scholar John Harrop maintains, the Lydie Breeze plays examine a group of 19th century social activists bound together by high-minded, utopian idealism (155). The characters who make up the Aipotu (Utopia spelled

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[69]"Superman," the comic book character, made a huge comeback on the silver screen in a blockbuster movie in 1978 (Gustaitis 45).

backwards) commune in the Lydie Breeze plays, however, have no more success in attaining their goals than the egotistic characters in Marco Polo Sings a Solo. Both plays consider the value of community; yet the tetralogy considers the historical roots of America's "dashed ideals" (Rose 120).

As a vehicle for examining the spiritual roots of the American dream, the Lydie Breeze Tetralogy interweaves, contrasts, and compares the personal and public concerns of the commune's founders and descendants. Employing the community as microcosm of American society, Guare alerts us that the high-minded precepts often associated with the American identity offer no safeguard against failure and cynicism; whatever the form or place, human beings inevitably surrender to emotional weakness and corruptibility. Indeed, Guare reports that he set his play in the nineteenth century to demonstrate the changelessness of human nature. Guare asserts, "Your interests, your concerns, stay the same, and history changes--it diffuses the reality of certain issues" (Qtd. in Harrop 155).

If one wonders how America got off track in the late seventies, the tetralogy submits something of a historic, though fictive and poetic, explanation. Guare seems to suggest that the American identity became equivocal in the late seventies and early eighties because illusions of post-World War II America could not withstand what Bercovitch has spoken of as the "encroachments of history,"

reality, and inevitable decline ("The Rites of Assent" 35). The psychology of abundance engendered in the fifties and sixties was dismantled by economic and political failures in the seventies. Consequently, when the grating realities of the decade no longer supported the long-held principles of the American dream, neurotic symptoms appeared. As Bercovitch contends, "History has been making it clear for some time that the hazards of living out the dream outweigh the advantages ("The Rites of Assent" 35).

In the tetralogy, Guare seems to agree with Bercovitch's assessment that recent history has disrupted the mythology of the American credo of individual self-reliance. The difficulties of decline and corruption insist on the acceptance of diminished expectations. Guare's final image of Aipotu features Joshua and his daughter, Lydie Hickman, together on the beach, reading the words of Walt Whitman in remembrance of Lydie Breeze, mother, wife, and founder of the commune. Joshua confides to his daughter, "She read to me. Just to me. Not to the others . . . Only to me. We sailed over the others. I was not afraid" (Lydie Breeze 55). Joshua re-interprets Whitman's words, which had inspired the formation of the utopian commune of Aipotu, to highlight the simple human contact between a father and a daughter (and a husband and wife).

Rather than utopian vision or materialistic pursuit, Guare advocates community, contact, and forgiveness as the best tools for exploring the complex frontier of the human spirit. In the Lydie Breeze Tetralogy, Guare argues that despite corruption, betrayal, violence, and emotional frailty, the human capacity for forgiveness allows for regeneration and progress. Just as Marco Polo Sings a Solo recommends a balance between the rights of the individual and the needs of the community, the Lydie Breeze Tetralogy support acceptance of human fallibility. When Joshua questions Lydie's proposal for Aipotu, Lydie angrily disagrees:

> Then go back to war. Go back where it's easy and cut and dried and the sides are drawn. Go back where the only prayer is for survival. A government tried to kill each of us in different ways. Should we vow to give each other only life? A government showed us hate. Shouldn't we agree to give each other only love? And trust? And peace? Shouldn't we agree? (Women and Water 102).

Lydie erroneously holds that the individual may rise above the flaws of human nature by withdrawing from a flawed society; hence the call for utopian retreat.

Even though Aipotu never comes close to achieving its founders' goals, the commune's articles of faith favorably compare to the credo of America's Puritan forefathers. America began as a haven of escape from Europe and its old world order. According to the Puritans, America was the "New Eden" ordained by God with a pure and holy mission ("The Rites of Assent" Bercovitch 8-11). America was the

land of the second chance, the land without history, one that offered endless new beginnings. In the view of theatre scholar Patricia Schroeder, the power of the individual compensated for the country's lack of history (The Presence of the Past 23). The American individual has always retained the power to repudiate history and begin anew. Yet by the nineteenth century, the country had recognized a "rootlessness" that no longer implied "joyous self-reliance" but "isolation and alienation" (The Presence of the Past 23).

Aipotu dramatizes how Lydie and her compatriots responded to the horrors of the Civil War. By refusing to yield their idealism (and choosing to withdraw from society), the founders of Aipotu condemned themselves to facing their own fallibility. By focusing on the Civil War, the rise of industrialism, and the approaching twentieth century, Guare in his tetralogy disputes the notion of a heroic American past, and, thereby, impugns the pronouncements and prophecies of the Reagan presidency. Rather, Guare challenges Americans to accept and embrace the darker sides of our identity and heritage.

Guare insists that America and America's past should not be held to utopian standards. Problems inevitably rise in any social arrangement. Once organized into collectives, humans enter a continuous process of negotiation. Consequently, the utopian impulse, even when

grounded in legitimate complaint, teaches us more about limitations than about perfection (Hansot 191). Writing after the close of World War II, philosopher and theologian Paul Tillich describes the oft-forgotten paradox of utopian thought:

> untruthfulness of utopia is that it describes impossibilities as real possibilities--and fails to see them for what they are, impossibilities, or as oscillation between possibility and impossibility . . . utopia succumbs to pure wishful thinking . . . projected out of and onto real processes . . . but not with what is essentially human . . . utopia forgets the finitude and estrangement of man--often does not acknowledge the darker fallen aspects of man's personality (Utopias and Utopian Thought xxi and 299).

In the Lydie Breeze plays, Aipotu's origination stems from Lydie's seemingly noble response both to the Civil War and her father's suicide (Gale 220). The truth of Aipotu's beginnings, however, is not unsullied. By reading her father's logbooks, Lydie learns that her father, when he would not stand for the murder of a slave aboard his whaling ship, was shot in the back by his own son. The son, Cabell, then wrested control of the ship (away from his father) and massacred all the blacks on board. When the vessel returned home, Cabell lied about what happened in order to collect on an insurance claim. Cabell even convinced Lydie, his sister, to lie out of loyalty to the family. When the body of a murdered slave washes up on shore, Captain Breeze suffers intense guilt and commits suicide. Lydie leaves Nantucket, searching for answers to

her father's death, and ends up as a nurse at the battle of Cold Harbor in 1864.

After escaping the battle, Lydie digs up her father's corpse, finds his logbooks, and learns the truth about the events on board the Gardenia. Prompted by the war's horror and her brother's patricide, Lydie dares Amos, Joshua and Dan to begin a community dedicated to the education of former slaves:

> We have achieved experience. We are transformed by experience. Not I. Not you or you or you. But us. On this beach. Right now. Together we're a great soul capable of doing extraordinary things" (Women and Water 103).

Lydie rhapsodizes about apocalypse and new beginnings, and goes on to argue that the Bible was arranged in the wrong order and should conclude with Adam and Eve, creation, and the appearance of God. In the midst of her lofty speeches, Lydie forgets the crime she herself has committed. Moments before this sequence in the play, Moncure exacts justice and murders Cabell. Acting as judge and jury, Lydie pardons Moncure and arranges a conspiracy of silence. While ordering that the logbooks be burned, Lydie hails a ship and warns Moncure: "Vanish. Go. You never existed. I never found you, Moncure. You never came back. Go" (Women and Water 101). Lydie's desire to begin again with Aipotu, then, is, in part at least, borne as an exculpation of her own guilt.

From its inception, Aipotu is awash in secrets and hidden crimes.[70] To be sure, the education of former slaves is a worthy goal. In reality, however, the seeds of Aipotu's beginnings were planted in tainted soil. As Guare submits, the source of society's corruption simply may be a matter of blood; family members and, indeed, all of humanity, inherit the capacity for evil. When convincing Lydie to lie on the witness stand, Cabell advises, "You and I are connected. Like a coin. Two halves of a coin that got snapped" (Women and Water 44). As Joshua tells Jeremiah, Dan's son, in Lydie Breeze, "Killing your father is the only true moment in my life . . . It's his betrayal that ruined your life. And I ruined Lydie Breeze's life. And she ruined mine. And we all carelessly ruined each other's lives" (36).

When the three plays of the tetralogy are examined in the playwright's intended order, Women and Water, which chronicles the formation of the utopian community, comes last. Consequently, when Amos, Joshua, Lydie, and Dan resign from the Civil War and "announce the commencement of a new life," the optimism of the moment is clouded with irony. When the three characters retreat, they lose their

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[70]According to scholar Patricia Schroeder, Ibsen's method of playwriting often concentrated on exploring issues of the past (25). Like O'Neill, Chekhov and others, Ibsen highlights the way the secret sins of the past come back to haunt the individual lives of the characters. In the tetralogy, Guare often mimics this technique.

moral impetus. Philosopher Tillich writes that "only where life risks itself, stakes itself, and imperils itself in going beyond itself, only there can it be won" ("Critique and Justification of Utopia" 307). As Joshua rails in Lydie Breeze,

> America could have been great . . . but we never trusted our dreams . . . We all should have been killed at Gettysburg. Caught the bullet at Antietam. The War Between the States was our finest hour, us as we truly are (36).

Guare's intention is to cast doubt on the formation of utopias based on self-righteous judgements. On the battlefield, the founders' cause was just and unquestioned. In retreat, they have nothing to fight against except each other. As Lydie Breeze and Gardenia attest, the corruption by the "red jewel" syphilis will proceed from generation to generation, revealing the hidden secrets of Aipotu.[71]

One may argue that Lydie's attempt to create a sanitized version of Aipotu's beginnings compares to the Reagan version of the American identity. Like Lydie, Reagan's vision created a climate of corruptibility. Invoking the heroic rhetoric of the western frontier after seeing the movie Rambo, Reagan replied, "I'll know what to do the next time something like this happens" (Qtd. in

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[71]Guare has bristled at the suggestion he stole the device of using syphilis (as the fatal connection between all the characters) from Ghosts (Harrop 158).

Gustaitis 52).[72] Yet despite some easy military victories over lesser powers, Reagan ignored clandestine activities within his own administration that created the Irangate scandal. Moreover, Cornel West writes that Reagan's revisionist and fantasy-laden version of American history has "Instead of reviving traditional values . . . yielded a populace that is suspicious of the common good and addicted to narrow pleasures" ("Market Culture Run Amok" 49).[73] Unlike Reagan, Guare is willing to "deal on a large scale with the checkered journey of American ideals and values from their Enlightenment conception to their post-Vietnam War practice" (Harrop 170).

By disputing the purity of the utopian impulse and by revealing the corruptibility of all, the tetralogy does not, however, sanction resignation from the democratic process (or the human race). While the tetralogy may not summon individuals to become active in the political process, Lydie Breeze does depict in a more favorable light, the human values espoused by the commune (seen against the mercenary mentality of the burgeoning industrial America). In Lydie Breeze, Guare questions the

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[72]President Clinton recently commented how the story of a rescued American pilot in Bosnia would make a good movie.

[73]West also contends that the eighties' "unapologetic retrenchment took the form of making people more comfortable with their prejudices . . . and discouraged a serious national conversation on the deep problems confronting us" ("Market Culture Run Amok" 48).

merits of an America where centralized power is controlled by the wealthy, who wield "American industry" as a political and economic weapon.

Set in 1895, Lydie Breeze takes place in the shattered remnants of Aipotu years after Lydie's suicide; the dawn of the twentieth century approaches and with it comes the reshaping of the future (Rich, "Stage: Guare's 'Lydie Breeze'" 344). Seemingly in charge of America's destiny, William Randolph Hearst and his political tool, Senator Amos Mason (one of the original founders of Aipotu) represent Guare's vision of the darker side of laissez-faire capitalism. Yet neither Hearst nor Mason appear in the play. Rather, Hearst and Mason act as forces who lie in wait, just off the shore of Nantucket on Hearst's "Rhode Island" sized yacht. As the owner of a publishing empire, Hearst's presence foreshadows the power of the mass media (as an extension of corporate America) to shape public opinion. Gussie describes Hearst's intolerance for the democratic process (and his power) in succinct terms: "Mr. Hearst decides what all the folks in America should think and then they think it" (Lydie Breeze 11).

Hearst's agenda, however, proves to be problematic; to usher in the new century, he appears to be planning a war with Spain to demonstrate that "The United States of America is not playing a bit part any more" (12). Since

Mason is Hearst's choice as the next Presidential candidate, a prevailing issue of the play concerns how the surviving members and descendants of the commune will respond to Mason's political aspirations. Perhaps because Mason orchestrated Joshua's release from prison (when Joshua decided not to publish a book that would have destroyed Mason's political career), Joshua, donning his old Civil War uniform, entertains the idea of meeting Mason and Hearst on the yacht. Despite being a convicted murderer, however, Joshua's still potent ideals emerge in an imaginary meeting:

> And this must be Mr. Hearst! So happy to meet you, sir . . . So you're planning to start a war on Spain. Good luck. Nothing like a war to bring men together. Give a country something to do. We loved our war . . . Only fitting that one of us will be the next President of the United States. Even though Amos was the least of us. But you'll see to that, won't you, Mr. Hearst? You and your newspapers? You'll make Amos your creation? Your monster?" (38).

Even though Joshua only speaks in soliloquy, the truth of his convictions surface, and one notes the fiery hope that will allow Joshua to reconcile with his daughters and address the wounds of the past.

Gussie, on the other hand, has already sold herself to Mason, since she is not only Mason's secretary but his "whore" (41). Gussie compares her dreams to that of her mother, the dead Lydie Breeze: "Ma was like me. I'm in love with the future. The next King. The next President" (27). Even though Mason's connection to the commune

destroys Gussie's political aspirations, Gussie is riddled with materialistic desires (given focus in Hearst's now departed yacht). At one point, Gussie reveals her misplaced priorities: "America is a yacht. He [Mason] says, 'America is a promise!' But I couldn't stop saying yacht" (49).

As she endeavors to complete the Ouija board's incomplete message of "F.O.R.G. . .," Joshua's daughter cannot discern "forg . . . iveness" and flees with an industrial sewing machine inventor whom she has only just met. Instead of forgiveness, she assumes the message must be to "forge ahead" (Rose 124). She proclaims, "It's almost 1900. I'm American, by God. It's about to be my century" (Lydie Breeze 53). Still, something positive seems to have taken place in the scene. Joshua tells his daughter he would have been happy to vote for her for President. Just before her departure, Gussie confides (though still unable to complete the message), "F.O.R.G. Oh, Pa, I'm glad to be home" (51).

While Gussie rushes headlong into the age of industrialism, Joshua remains on the island with his other daughter, Lydie. In answering Lydie's request that Joshua teach her courage, he reads the passage from Walt Whitman that Lydie Breeze shared with him their first night on the island. Joshua recites and encourages his daughter to brush her fingers over the words:

> On the beach at night alone . . . A vast similitude interlocks all. All spheres, grown, ungrown, small, large, suns, moons, planets, All distances of time . . . All souls All lives and deaths, all of the past, present, future, This vast similitude spans them and has always spanned And shall forever span them and compactly hold and enclose them (56).

Throughout the tetralogy, Guare summons the words of Whitman, Emerson and Thoreau, authors who characterized much of nineteenth century social and political thought (Rose 122). By employing the Whitman passage as the tetralogy's unifying theme (the idea appears in all the plays), Guare seems to be advocating Emerson's idea that "individual regeneration must precede social politics" (Irving Howe Qtd. in Rose 122). In other words, individuals should acknowledge their common bonds and make contact before addressing the larger issues of politics and society.

Even though Guare echoes Tillich's criticism of the "inherently demonic" nature of utopian pursuits, the playwright is looking for what binds people together; in the tetralogy what holds people together is their weakness and imperfection. Despite a trip to the Parthenon to discover his "connection with the ages," Joshua confesses to Lydie,

> Sappho and Sophocles are about to sing their song. Yes! Plato and Aristotle are walking on this very ground . . . And All I saw was you. You were my voyage. You were my Europe. You were my mythology (Gardenia 59-60).

It is Joshua's honesty that begins the healing and liberation of his soul. He explains to Lydie Breeze why he killed Dan and destroyed Aipotu:

> There was no noble motive. There was no great passion. The same petty furies that made me kill the gardenia, those same petty furies made me kill Dan. Rage over losing you. Oh Christ--in all our dreaming we never allowed for the squalid, petty furies . . . We mistook the size of the ocean, the size of the sky for the size of our souls . . . It's taken this prison to show me our true horizons. I want to look our petty furies in the face and name them and lose them (Gardenia 59).

Joshua eventually comes to terms with his darker nature, but Lydie, however, does not escape the snare of perfectionism; she hangs herself in despair. Earlier in Gardenia, Lydie wonders, "Faithfiality? Faithful to the initial impulse--that seems to be the hardest thing for a human being to do" (23). Rather than face the truth that "anything can happen" in life, Lydie tries to kill her daughters (54). As a convicted murderer himself, however, Joshua comes to appreciate the impossibility and damning quality of Lydie's belief in "faithfiality."

Consequently, while in prison, Joshua ennobles the lives of other convicted murderers by teaching them to read. He also writes an honest account of Aipotu and its failure. Indeed, the character William Dean Howells, who had earlier rejected Joshua's first book for its European influence, hopes to publish Joshua's account and praises it as a contribution to an emerging, true American literature. The real Howells believed that to be truly American

> The writer need do nothing more than tell the truth about society in order to illustrate the ideal of democracy and equality . . . his interest in the meanest and noblest, through the mere virtue of their humanity (Smith, "Fiction and the American Ideology" 47).

Guare refines Howells' idea by calling for the acceptance of the dark features of human nature. Guare does not advocate a Machiavellian mentality, but he rather shows that the denial of evil (or the belief in utopian perfection) will most certainly result in tragic consequences. It becomes most revealing that Joshua becomes the only member of the original commune to find redemption.

In the final moments of Gardenia, Joshua's encounter with a condemned prisoner, who is on his way to the gallows discloses that honesty does not guarantee "happy endings." Joshua recounts the prisoner's words to Mason:

> Mr. Hickman, how does Robinson Crusoe end? I called back: He goes home. The Mauler: Sir, is that a happy ending? Yes, I called back (Gardenia 46).

Inspired by what he has learned from European literature, The Mauler attempts to escape. Quoting The Count of Monte Cristo, The Mauler cries, "The world is mine," and scales the prison walls only to "lose his balance and fall . . . back into prison" (62). Describing the dramatic effect of the scene, theatre critic Walter Kerr writes:

> We understand, in his grinning shrug, that happy endings have very, very little to do with ever going home. No sentimentality in any of this. Just savage irony, patiently pursued ("A Distant Way of Doing Things" II-5).

According to Guare, what may truly identify American literature, then, is the absence of sentimentality, and the avoidance of "arrogant misuse of art" (Guare Qtd. in Harrop 159). Guare raises Henry James and Fyodor Dostoevsky as the true models for his tetralogy because, those authors depicted what they honestly observed; they did not try to convey truth through the device of artistic "enrichment." Guare contends:

> Cecil B. De Mille ennobled people--you came out of The Song of Bernadette feeling holy! It gives you a costume--ennobling is like a costume No: you just work, you say what it feels like to be this person at this particular moment, and that these are the issues surrounding that moment of being--the dangers, the weaknesses, the surprises . . . That's all you can do (159).

As Guare's imperfect emissary, Joshua survives because he comes not only to accept but to embrace the truth--the "dangers, the weaknesses, the surprises" (159).

Stylistically, the Lydie Breeze Tetralogy and Marco Polo Sings a Solo adopt completely different strategies. Marco Polo Sings a Solo addresses the issue of "people living without limits." Consequently, Guare places no limits on the structure, narrative, or theatrical elements in the play. Guare takes his characters to the "brink" of a new millennium by way of the ridiculous and the absurd. As Feingold notes, Guare employs some of the same techniques in Marco Polo Sings a Solo that Kurt Vonnegut utilizes in his futuristic novels, that is, "to grab a

cliche and twist it into life by taking it literally" ("Freeze-Dried Despair" 42). Critic Kroll asserts that Marco Polo Sings a Solo "explodes like a pinata, littering the stage with fragments, some bright and delightful, some torn and frazzled" ("Slapshtik" 66). As a principle technique in Marco Polo Sings a Solo, Guare employs "scattershot irreverence" to comment on the excesses of American culture in the seventies (Barnes, "'Marco Polo Sings a Solo'" 344).

Yet Marco Polo Sings a Solo invokes the name of Ibsen in ways that foretell the poetic approach adopted in the tetralogy. Larry remarks, "Ibsen knew everything. Even though you know the plot of this play [A Doll House], you lean forward, Ibsen makes you lean forward" (26). In 1999, however, A Doll House gets performed on trampolines.[74] Despite the levity of Guare's references to Ibsen in Marco Polo Sings a Solo, the play reveals that Ibsen was on the author's mind. In words that mirror Joshua's frustration in Gardenia, Frank outlines one of the central ideas of Marco Polo Sings a Solo:

> Why is that all the things that should hold us together, help us change--love, creativity, sex, talent, dreams--those are the very elements that drive us apart and the things that you think would separate us--hate, fear, meanness--those are the very things

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[74]Guare is also satirizing modern conceptualizations that sometimes result in creating an unintended (and hilarious) effect. The character Diane remarks how "Nora doesn't just walk out the door, she leapt this incredible bounce into freedom" (Marco Polo Sings a Solo 26).

> that bind us together and keep us from growing. Keep us from changing (44).

Although Frank's comment whizzes by in near unnoticeable fashion in Marco Polo Sings a Solo, the content of his remarks well delineates the major themes of betrayal and redemption which constitute the Lydie Breeze Tetralogy.

In the tetralogy, Guare abandons the theatricality and absurdist satire of Marco Polo Sings a Solo in favor of a poetic narrative that recalls the nineteenth-century novel and the poetically realistic playwriting style employed by Ibsen.[75] The tetralogy takes America back to the period after the Civil War, parallels to the post-Vietnam seventies and early Reagan years, when re-assessment of the American identity became a national priority. The tetralogy reflects the eighties by depicting the utopian dynamics which ultimately foster corruption.

However, Guare's sudden shift toward melodrama occurred during the early eighties when the presence of a Hollywood actor in the White House provided Guare an easy satiric target. The heady atmosphere of unbridled nationalism which permeated the Reagan years may have been the time when Guare's "irrepressible high spirits and wayward humor," could have had a profound effect on

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[75]Despite Guare's attempt to give the critics more straightforward structure of poetic realism and "get the theater back to being a place of poetry, a place where language can reign," most critics responded by wondering what happened to the bold, inventive theatrics of his earlier plays (Guare, Qtd. in Cattaneo 102).

American society (Oliver, Rev. of Landscape of the Body 98). In the Lydie Breeze plays, however, Guare preferred to retreat to the nineteenth century and Nantucket Island to state his case in the form of an extended poetic soap opera.

Like Guare's tetralogy, Reagan evoked an imaginary history of America, a mythic history which perhaps never existed except in the imaginations of a frustrated and fearful public. As the leader of a nation unsure of its future, Reagan may have provided the populace a momentary respite from the confusion of the seventies (and a quixotic over-dose of nationalism). However, Reagan also gave Americans a legacy of debt, social polarization and corruption whose effects are still being measured in the nineties (Combs 140-143). When compared with the portrayal of America in the tetralogy, Reagan's election seems to be more the "electoral expression of a culture of defeat" than a new beginning for the American dream (Krieger 131). As Historian Rupert Wilkinson argues, Americans in the late seventies and early eighties "had lost a sense of community, not just with each other but with past and future generations" (243).

In Marco Polo Sings a Solo and the Lydie Breeze Tetralogy, Guare confronts our loss of community by examining America's past and future to reveal the roots of our idealism and the ways it has engendered selfish

pursuits. In face of Reagan's tendency to romanticize the past as a sort of Western melodrama, Guare's fictional "soap opera" account of Aipotu represents an intuitive response to the nostalgia and greed of the eighties.[76] By focusing on the decaying legacy of small group of idealists, whose soap-opera-like peccadilloes, scandals, selfishness and acts of violence led to their downfall, Guare may have achieved in the tetralogy a more lasting satiric comment than most critics allowed.[77] Furthermore, with the dawn of a new millennium at hand, the widening hole in the ozone layer of earth's atmosphere (coupled with recent efforts to undo environmental legislation), could, in fact, bring Stony's iceberg (in Marco Polo Sings a Solo) to America's doorstep. Despite the works' commercial failure, Marco Polo Sings a Solo and the Lydie Breeze Tetralogy represent accurate and insightful treatises into the re-appearance of America's frontier spirit during the eighties.

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[76]Although he fostered a suspicion of the printed word, media critic McLuhan advocated the mythological values of soap opera. McLuhan asserted that "horse opera and soap opera are, like the myths of ancient Greece, expressions of a society's ideology and anxieties" (Understanding Media Qtd. in Brookeman 132).

[77]Theatre critic Rich described Lydie Breeze as an "overly plotty yet static potboiler . . . 'Peyton Place' meets 'Ragtime'" ("Stage: Guare's 'Lydie Breeze'" 344).

CHAPTER 5:

COLLAPSING THE BOUNDARIES BETWEEN FANTASY AND REALITY: ACCOUNTING FOR EXPERIENCE IN SIX DEGREES OF SEPARATION AND FOUR BABOONS ADORING THE SUN

Six Degrees of Separation demonstrates how Guare has come full circle, thematically and theatrically, since the notable success of The House of Blue Leaves in 1971. Six Degrees of Separation, Guare's most commercially successful play since The House of Blue Leaves, addresses many of the same issues, yet the former abandons the world of the cheap nightclub and Queens for the "stained glass," high culture venue of mid-town Manhattan (Six Degrees of Separation 9). Nonetheless, both works confront the problems of how Americans assimilate media culture and how individuals struggle to make interpersonal contact. According to Guare, the desire to "be famous for fifteen minutes . . . is the great engine of twentieth century life" (Chatfield-Taylor, Qtd. in Friend 329). Since the beginning of his career, Guare has argued that such ephemeral pursuits intrude on family life and generate no lasting benefits (only a loss of contact with reality and with others). Guare's most recent work, Six Degrees of Separation (1990) and Four Baboons Adoring the Sun (1992), thus reiterates these concerns and demonstrates that the confusion for Americans living in this type of media culture has only intensified since The House of Blue Leaves (Rich, "Theater: John Guare's 'House of Blue Leaves'"

C-21). Guare has stated: "Our own identities are so nebulous, we're just these appetites that float through life" (Qtd. in Friend 329).

Like Artie and Bunny, Ouisa and Flan in Six Degrees of Separation are "scrambling" to make their idealistic, grandiose dreams come true (Channing, Qtd. in Story 42). Suffering from the same type of disillusionment as the husband of The House of Blue Leaves, who want to be movie moguls, Ouisa and Flan fall prey to a stranger's deception due to the emptiness which plagues their existence. In this light, we see that Paul's scheme succeeds not only because he taps into Ouisa and Flan's flamboyant desire--they wish to be in the movie of Cats--but because Paul offers himself to them as the perfect surrogate son (Six Degrees 40). Paul stands ready to show Ouisa and Flan how to "exit from the maze of [their] nightmare" (37). Indeed, the two seem most alive when they are the most deeply embroiled in Paul's lies and treachery.

According to Guare, the face people fear most in the nineties is the one in the mirror or across the dinner table (Six Degrees of Separation 26). Although daily life rarely measures up to the excitement portrayed in the media, Guare wants people in the nineties to savor the experience of life, to accept reality and fully live in the moment. When Ouisa dreams that she is talking with Sidney Poitier about the film version of Cats, Paul appears as

Poitier and asks the play's basic philosophical question. He inquires:

> Why is life at this point in the twentieth century so focused on the very beginning of life and the very end of life? What about the eighty years we have to live between those inexorable book ends? (30)

Over the course of the play, Paul leads Ouisa to develop a new awareness of reality. Ironically, Ouisa's illumination exacts a heavy price; Paul's hoax leads Ouisa to the discovery that she and Flan are a "terrible match" (62).

Guare's following play, Four Baboons Adoring the Sun, compares the conflict between fantasy and reality to the exaggerated emotions and innocence of first love. Unlike Marco Polo Sings a Solo, a play in which technology assumes a negative role, the powerful forces of "nature run amok" in Four Baboons Adoring the Sun and destroy Penny's and Philip's chance for a new beginning (Hall, Preface to Four Baboons Adoring the Sun xi). In fashion similar to the Lydie Breeze Tetralogy and its utopian idealism, Four Baboons Adoring the Sun depicts the adventure of two family "tribes" on an archaeological dig in Sicily. Celebrating the euphoria of new love and new beginnings, Penny and Philip hope to banish old commitments and bad marriages (from their lives in America) among the debris of ancient history. Exemplifying the problem of Greek tragedy, Penny and Philip, however, are guilty of a modern day form of hubris. The starry-eyed couple undertake an elaborate, mythic drama of escape to the primitive landscape of an

archaeological dig, believing that, by the force of their own wills, they can erase their past mistakes and gain the opportunity to start over. Despite their imprudence, Guare grants them the power to conjure up the presence of the god of chaos, Eros. As Philip and Penny embrace in a passionate kiss before their children, Eros sings:

> This is the moment
> You think you're gifted
> To see the present
> Outweigh the past
> You find your true selves
> In that precious moment
> Grace touches you
> I move in too (22).

As Eros looks on, Philip and Penny pretend to write a new history for themselves, that of an ideal family life in the hillsides of ancient Sicily. However, as Eros warns in his song, chaos "move[s] in too." In fact, Philip and Penny find their "true selves" only in losing one of their children. Like Ouisa and Flan, Penny and Philip discover the void left when the elaborate fictions that have sustained their love are shattered.

By focusing on the way families (and by extension American culture in the nineties) rely on fictions for fulfillment, Six Degrees of Separation and Four Baboons Adoring the Sun illustrate French philosopher Jean Baudrillard's contention that American society, and western society in general, has crossed over an irretrievable "dead point," a point where reality itself seems to have disappeared (Kellner 68-71). According to Baudrillard, the

individual in contemporary culture emerges only as a media generated replica of himself. Assessing Baudrillard's views, scholar Douglas Kellner submits:

> Baudrillard sees the function of television and mass media as prevention of response, by isolating and privatizing individuals . . . the media pander to the masses reproducing their taste, their interest in spectacle and entertainment, their fantasies and way of life, thereby giving rise to an implosion between mass consciousness and media phantasmagoria . . . which freezes individuals into functioning as terminals of media . . . (69-71).

In short, modern society has become a playground of fictive models which have subsumed reality altogether.

Baudrillard's idea of "hyperreality" resembles a map drawn (by the media) in one to one scale (Selected Writings 166). For instance, Baudrillard describes how Disneyland's Americana re-creations have become the "hyperreality" of the ideal American life (Selected Writings 171). According to Baudrillard, Disneyland epitomizes how the manifold media instantiations of American culture detract from reality and replace the real with the "more real than real" (Kellner 83). In sum, Disneyland no longer refers to America; Disneyland is America.[78] Due to an over-saturation of media images, social interaction, civility and communication have disappeared into a "black hole of signs" and have been replaced by mass indifference

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[78]Guare evidences Baudrillard's assertions in Four Baboons Adoring the Sun, when seven year old Robin ignores the danger of a real earthquake because she thinks its like a ride in Disneyland (50).

and confusion (Kellner 68, 87). Consequently, humanity in the nineties finds itself trapped in "a universe of simulacra in which it is impossible to distinguish between the spectacle and the real and in which individuals come to prefer spectacle to 'reality'" (Kellner 71).

For Baudrillard, the modern "promiscuity of information" renders choice, moral or otherwise, obsolete (72). Representing polar extremes of modern society, for instance, both "safe-sex videos" and fundamentalist TV preachers advocate denial of bodily experience through abstinence (Yudice 34). The threat of AIDS has become a tool to sell both pornography and religion.[79] Television star Suzanne Sommers has made a television movie which tells the story of her own life (Sommers portrays herself).[80] The highly publicized media attention given to Nancy Kerrigan and Tonya Harding, as well as Clarence

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[79]Former Surgeon General Jocelyn Elders was fired for talking openly about masturbation ("Life Remembers '94" 70). Even though masturbation represents a singular sexual activity, masturbation could be seen as a healthy alternative to abstinence. Nonetheless, (despite the clinical nature of her remarks), Elders' firing mirrors society's discomfort with overt discussion of human sexuality. Even with the appearance of a condom that plays Beethoven when it malfunctions, American society seems determined to hide from its own sexual feelings ("Parade: The Best and Worst of Everything" 5). Baudrillard might thus argue that it is little wonder then that Woody Allen dates his own step-daughter. In such a repressed society, Allen's skewed parental judgement reveals the nineties' version of dating that is "more real than real."

[80]Sommers' movie may set a trend for nineties's style autobiographies.

Thomas and Anita Hill no doubt obscured the truth and the whole issue of right and wrong (! 6). In face of such ambiguity, gaining some sort of existential foothold in the nineties seems almost an impossibility.

Despite the hopelessness implicit in Baudrillard's assessment, Americans in the nineties continue to long for contact and meaning. In fact, many yearn for a type of family contact that existed before the mass media's dominance of societal discourse. American society of the fifties experienced a shift in sensibility related to the advent of television (and the rise of the media's power). Riesman observed that the populace, the young in particular, of post-World War II America was moving from an "inner directed" to an "other directed" orientation (The Lonely Crowd Qtd. in Wilkinson 52). Riesman theorized that inner directed individuals took their cues for meaningful living from within the family structure, while other directed types responded to social signals generated outside the family. Concurrent with the advent of television, young people began to regard their peers, "others," for direction and purpose (Riesman, The Lonely Crowd in Wilkinson 58). Peer pressure thus began to influence consumer trends and marketing decisions (Riesman, The Lonely Crowd in Wilkinson 52). Consequently, a "striving" to keep up with the latest fad became a new

constant of American life (Riesman, The Lonely Crowd in Wilkinson 61).

As the borders between family and society began to collapse, society also began to lose its sense of traditional values (61). In turn, society grew more polarized, disparate, and diverse. As the role and prestige of the mass media increased and the role of the family decreased, people experienced greater incertitude and alienation. By the eighties, Americans had grown weary of upheaval and invoked the nostalgic, traditional values of what Riesman has called the "inner directed" family. In the nineties, however, Riesman's theory of "other direction" has proven accurate in ways that have resulted in the almost complete domination of the media. Although the nostalgic desire for the good old days was a key component of the Reagan revolution, the nineties reflects an odd juxtaposition of desires, the wish for both family and celebrity. Michael Jackson, the androgynous mega-pop star, endeavored to dispel the accusations of homosexuality and pedophilia by having Elizabeth Taylor appear as his "hyper-real" mother figure and then by marrying the "hyper-real" daughter of "The King," Elvis Presley.[81] Compelled to rescue himself through his own self-styled

[81]An interesting study would conduct a comparison between the two Bible-Belt versions of "The King," Jesus Christ and Elvis Presley. It could possibly be argued that, for many southerners, there might not be many functional differences between the two.

media version of "family values," Jackson's marriage reflects a preposterous, yet not uncommon, example of modern confusion and desire.[82]

For Baudrillard, the desire for traditional values in such a society, however, only serves to "redouble" the effect of the desire and, thereby, increase human vulnerability and the propensity for seduction. Thus, "hyper-pursuits" for fulfillment in a "hyperreal" society may lead to rash behavior. Writing about terrorism, Baudrillard remarks how "the search for proof--indeed the objectivity of the fact--does not check this vertigo of interpretation" (Selected Writings 175).[83] The terrorist act becomes a "mass mediated simulation," a political window, that continues to mutate and evolve while the victims find themselves "transform[ed] into "commodified media" symbols of national unity (Yudice; Baudrillard 174). One need only look to the Oklahoma City bombing to see the way politicians on the left and right have used the incident to enhance their own positions.[84]

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[82]Some media figures in the nineties, however, (like NBA star Charles Barkley, who declared: "I am not a role model") are seeking to relinquish parental roles.

[83]Baudrillard asserts his argument describing the Watergate scandal and bombings in Italy.

[84]Desert Storm, Granada, Panama, Somalia, and the Branch Davidian fiasco give some credence to the suspicions of critics who see political opportunism in the use of military power.

In Six Degrees of Separation, Guare demonstrates the ways American culture of the nineties has become flooded with models and simulacra which contribute to the "death of the imagination" and transform society into an "unconscious" mass of uncritical individuals (Six Degrees of Separation 24-26). Guare elevates media intrusions on private life to the hyper-real level by showing the severity of modern susceptibility to fantasy. Everything about the interloper Paul is a fiction and a performance. Critic Mimi Kramer recognized that Paul's character changed during the course of the play like a "series of unconnected portraits," a phenomenon which led her to wonder if, indeed, different actors had been employed to play the role ("Interlude 1990" 72). As an extreme example of guerilla theatre, Paul impersonates Poitier's son in virtuosic fashion. Paul, however, does not perform on a stage or in a theatre. Rather, Paul makes house calls. Paul's histrionics represent the saturation of society with, what Baudrillard calls, an

> ecstatic form of theater: no more stage, no more content; theater in the streets, without actors, theater for everyone by everyone, which . . . merge[s] with the exact unfolding of our lives, lives without illusion (Selected Writings 186).

Thoroughly masking the artifice of his performance, Paul cooks, cleans, and even goes so far as to stab himself (thereby, ingratiating himself to his hosts).[85] In a self-assured lecture on Catcher in the Rye,[86] which is the subject of Paul's thesis, Paul even has the audacity to reveal the secret power of his seduction:

> The imagination has moved out of the realm of being our link, our most personal link, with our inner lives and the world outside that world--this world we share. What is schizophrenia but a horrifying state where what's in here doesn't match up with what's out there? Why has imagination become a synonym for style . . . I believe the imagination in another phrase for what is most uniquely us . . . To face ourselves. That's the hard thing. The imagination (25-26).

Paul's monologue ably voices Guare's contention that society has lost the capability of discerning truth from fiction. Ouisa and Flan no longer seem to know who they are and are unable to make their longings "match up with what's out there" (25). Unmasking Paul means facing themselves. After Paul's speech, Flan myopically declares, "I hope your muggers read every word," while Geoffrey vows to buy a copy of Catcher in the Rye and read it on the plane home (26). Ouisa, Flan, Geoffrey, and all of Paul's

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[85]After dinner, Paul enacts a grandiloquent gesture and insists on doing the dishes. He reveals his penchant for acting when he entreats Ouisa to watch: "It gives me a thrill to be looked at" (27).

[86]While assassins Mark David Chapman and Jon Hinckley both cited Catcher in the Rye as the source of their inspiration, one of the nineties' choice for transfer of blame and responsibility has shifted to Butthead of "Beavis and Butthead," who were recently blamed for a teenager's arson binge.

other victims serve as representatives of those in the nineties who avoid the truth of self-examination and the acceptance of their personal shortcomings. As Ouisa recounts later, "He did more for us in a few hours than our children ever did" (61).

Paul ensnares Ouisa, Flan and Geoffrey by playing upon their vanity, emptiness and desire, and by appealing to their liberal sensibilities. He taps the guilt and arrogance of the white upper class by pretending to be the type of black American, like Poitier, who has risen above race and class as a "barrier breaker" and has made something of himself (Kissel, "'Separation' Gets It All Together" 155). In short, Ouisa, Flan and Geoffrey patronize Paul. By feigning injury at the hands of muggers, who stole the only copy of his thesis, Paul provides his wealthy hosts the perfect opportunity to employ their Red Cross training, purge their guilt, and prove to themselves that they are good people (Six Degrees of Separation 17). By taking pity on Paul and allowing him into their home, Ouisa and Paul "emphasize the discrepancy" between his lot and theirs (Perls, Ego, Hunger and Aggression 154).

Critic Jack Kroll notes the arrogance often associated with such supposed charity. He writes, "It's as if this apparition from the shadows embodies all the fragmented potential that his privileged victims have perverted"

("Channing Takes Stock" 54). In chameleon-like fashion, Paul temporarily re-invigorates his victims' lives by becoming the "right" person to make their dreams come true (Friend 329). Like the double-sided painting by Kandinsky which revolves over the stage, Paul penetrates their lives by fitting the "corresponding vibration" in their souls (Six Degrees of Separation 18). With Paul's intrusion into various living rooms (and bedrooms) in New York, Guare acknowledges how media images can affect private life.

The significant point of intersection between criminal and victim, however, may not so much be Paul's consummate skill as a con man, but that his prey is all too willing to embrace him out of their own needs. For instance, Trent falls for Paul's "striptease" in order to be touched. Rick and Elizabeth, naive newcomers to New York, see the reflection of their loneliness in Paul's performance as the outcast son. Paul succeeds because he understands what his victims need; his victims see what they want to see, what they need and do not have in their real lives. This dynamic suggests that, for individuals in the '90s, fictional constructs are often utilized as a means of gaining fulfillment.

Guare complicates the issue of modern fulfillment by highlighting the ways people endeavor to "restore" their families "through simulation" (Baudrillard Qtd. in Kellner 180). In order to underscore the individual's hope to

achieve fulfillment through interpersonal relationships in Six Degrees of Separation, Guare utilizes, or perhaps creates, a popular myth, which holds that anyone in the world can be connected to any other person by a network of just six people. The myth of six degrees of separation offers a simple yet perplexing formula for intimacy. As Ouisa tells the audience, the trick is to "find the right six people" (45).

According to Guare, the search for the right six people should start at home. As critic Kramer proposes, children represent the truest connection in an unconnected world ("Interlude 1990" 72). Nonetheless, in Six Degrees of Separation, Paul substitutes for a whole host of children, from different families. Indeed, when forced to make a choice between Tess and Paul, Ouisa and Flan opt for the latter by "cutting off" their daughter. Instead, Ouisa and Paul try to save Paul from the throes of the police. Tess escalates the domestic battle by threatening to elope and flee to Afghanistan; Flan dismisses his daughter's hysteria and asks her to call back at a later time. Woody echos his sister's animosity upon discovering that Paul had been given his pink shirt. Woody conveys his sense of betrayal in a temper tantrum:

> You gave him my pink shirt? You gave a complete stranger my pink shirt? That pink shirt was a Christmas present from you. I treasured that shirt. I loved that shirt . . . And you gave that shirt away. I can't believe it. I hate it here. I hate this house. I hate you (42).

Yet even after learning the truth about Paul's treachery, Ouisa declares that Paul gave her what her children do not. Ouisa recounts that Paul has "this wild quality--yet a real elegance and a real concern and a real consideration" (36). By using the word "real" three times in one sentence to characterize a con-man, Ouisa divulges the nature of her longing. To her mother, Tess responds: "Well, Mom, you should have let him stay. You should have divorced all your children and just let this dreamboat stay" (36). Where Paul had been urbane and witty, Ouisa's real kids prove whiny and selfish. These very real family members expect much and give little.

Once his treachery has been discovered, however, Paul reveals his own selfish motivations; he hopes that Ouisa and Flan will take him into the family as an apprentice son. Paul thus becomes the victim of his own schemes--and yields to the deluded belief that Ouisa and Flan represent his deliverance. Paul agrees to turn himself in to the police on the condition that Ouisa and Flan help him start a new life. Ouisa and Flan, however, arrive too late to escort him to the police station and are never able to find Paul again. Described in the play as "a kid waiting for his family," Paul ultimately appears more desperate to "fit in" than his victims (44).

Ouisa grieves over Paul's missed chance at redemption and comes to recognize the emptiness in her life. When asked why Paul meant so much to her, Ouisa answers:

> He wanted to be us. Everything we are in the world, this paltry thing--our life--he wanted it. He stabbed himself to get in here. He envied us. We're not enough to be envied (61).

Paradoxically, as Baudrillard submits, the "deepest desire is perhaps to give the responsibility for one's desire to someone else" (Selected Writings 215), and in Six Degrees of Separation, "someone else" signifies the idealized fictions of one's own dreams. Ouisa and Flan need Paul to be the "someone else" who is the perfect son, while Paul needs the couple to be the perfect parents.[87]

Despite the fact that the nineties have revealed the U.S. as a simulacra dominated society, Guare also demonstrates the ways experience can appear in something of a raw state, often in violent jolts. In Six Degrees of Separation, Paul's hoax (and the fantasy it elicits) is demolished when a male hustler is discovered in his bedroom. Yet the rush of fear which comes over Ouisa and Flan at least certifies for them that they are alive. Consequently, Ouisa and Flan embrace, cling to each other, and call their children on the phone, relating their brush

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[87]Theatre scholar Brustein criticizes Guare for utilizing the "Captain Queeg Maneuver--reversing our attitude toward a knavish character in order to accommodate an emotional climax" (Rev. of Six Degrees of Separation 34).

with death. Like soldiers in battle, Ouisa and Flan experience danger first hand and find themselves "ripped back into being alive" (Campbell 114). Yet this moment (and its adrenaline rush) quickly subsides and becomes part of the mythological aura that surrounds Paul.

Paul's criminal record suggests that Paul takes delight in forcing his victims to confront reality in shocking ways. Paul wines, dines, and dances with Rick in an extravagant romantic evening at the Rainbow Room (using the money that Rick and Elizabeth have loaned him). After having sex with Paul, Rick worries about how he is going to explain this experience to his girlfriend. Rick confesses to Elizabeth what happened: "It was the greatest night I ever had and before we got home he kissed me on the mouth and he vanished" (50). Though Paul later claims he meant Rick no harm, Paul's sabotage of Rick and Elizabeth's relationship seems mean-spirited and purposeful. In the panic just before his suicide, Rick reflects, "I came here to have experience. But I didn't come here to do this" (50). The issue does not seem to be that Paul forced Rick to confront his latent homosexuality; rather, Paul exploited Rick's loneliness for personal gain.

Guare also argues however, that, once endured, even the most dramatic experiences lose their power and are re-absorbed into memory as "anecdote." Paul dazzled the Kittredges like the vibrant "bursts of color" painted on

the two-sided Kandinsky. Ouisa sadly remembers what Paul contributed to their lives and angrily wonders what the entire series of events ultimately means:

> And we turn him into an anecdote to dine out on. Or dine in on. But it was an experience. I will not turn him into an anecdote. How do we fit what happened to us into life without turning it into anecdote with no teeth . . . How do we keep the experience? (62).

As psychologist Perls might suggest, Ouisa wants "to hang onto what [she] has . . . to freeze the fluid present, to make a permanency out of it" (Ego, Hunger, and Aggression 206).

Paul, however, errs when he assumes that Ouisa and Flan have something that the young con-man lacks. When Ouisa asks Paul what he wants from them, Paul responds, "Everlasting friendship" (54). Though Paul refuses to believe her, Ouisa correctly reminds him that, "Nobody has that" (54). Still, once Paul has disappeared, Ouisa knows that she has been changed forever. Flan goes on just as before, energetically pursuing the next million dollar art deal, but Ouisa sees life in a new way. Commentator Kroll asserts, "It's Ouisa who's awakened by the amoral Paul to the emptiness of life in the fast lane to nowhere" ("Channing Takes Stock" 54). Ouisa laments Paul's probable suicide at the end of the play, but she has begun to comprehend the painful necessity of accepting life's transitory nature.

Ouisa awakes from her unfulfilled dreams to deplore the lost moments of the past and describes herself as a "collage of unaccounted-for brush strokes . . . all random" (Friend 329, Six Degrees of Separation 62). Ouisa perceives that no matter how strongly one wishes to grasp the precious moments of life experience, reality changes from second to second (62). However, in Guare's own words, "mental health is not analogous to amnesia" (Qtd. in Friend 329). Ouisa continues to long for the vibrant "burst" of experience that Paul evoked, but she has come to accept a more ambiguous definition of fulfillment. Ouisa would perhaps embrace Perls' notion that "this ever-changing something, elusive and insubstantial, is the only existing reality" (Ego, Hunger, and Aggression 206).

In the final image of Six Degrees of Separation, Paul appears to Ouisa and states: "The Kandinsky. It's painted on two sides" (62). Paul disappears; Ouisa "considers" Paul's words and "smiles" as the Kandinsky begins to revolve above her (63). As critic Rich notes, the Kandinsky "emblemizes" the "horrifying state" of "schizophrenia" experienced by many Americans in the nineties ("'Six Degrees' Reopens" 155). While "one side is geometric and somber [and] the other side is wild and vivid," the Kandinsky serves to remind the audience how people are "divorced" from their imaginations and estranged (Six Degrees 11, Rich, "'Six Degrees' Reopens" 155). Paul

eloquently expresses Guare's challenge, which calls for individuals to align their external and internal realities, to make contact, and live in the moment. A confident Paul announces, "I believe that the imagination is the passport we create to take us into the real world" (25). For Paul, the imagination

> teaches us our limits and then how to grow beyond those limits . . . the voice that wakes you up and says this is what I'm afraid of . . . the noon voice that sees clearly . . . the exit from the maze of your nightmare . . . if we don't listen to that voice, it dies (37).

In short, the imagination is the seat of self-examination and the repository of individual dreams. Guare wants people to trust their own powers of observation, their own powers of creativity, and to stop relying on media projected fictions for fulfillment.

While Ouisa and Flan adopt Paul as the "perfect" son, Philip and Penny in Four Baboons Adoring the Sun present themselves as impeccable "models," both as parents and lovers, before their impressionable, pliable children (39). Philip and Penny abandon urban America and the world of television in search of truth, new beginnings, and "escape from the twentieth century;" they thus embark on a journey to the ancient, volcanic island of Sicily (Four Baboons Adoring the Sun 6). Four Baboons Adoring the Sun features Penny's and Philip's attempts to achieve a sort of fabricated primitiveness, one reminiscent of Argue's Etruscan fantasies in Muzeeka. Since the children in the

play, all of them thirteen or younger, represent innocence and naivete, the parents believe they can save their progeny from the corruption of a modern media dominated America. However, Philip and Penny find that their children take everything they say and do much too literally.

As the newlyweds construct an intricate drama of rebirth, Philip and Penny cavort about like young lovers. Before their children, they defend the appropriateness of their respective divorces and the sanctity of their newly "forged" family. Around the campfire, Penny instructs the children:

> That's why we're here. To release those treasures. In you. In you. And you and you and you. In all of you. In Philip. In me. You can laugh at those silly myths in that stupid book. People transformed into trees. Into birds. But we have become transformed. We have become a family . . . You are not the same kids who got on that plane in America last night. You are transformed (46).

The children, however, do not grasp the "grandeur" of the enterprise; they do not understand their new history or their ability to write themselves. Instead, the children see only "pots and beads" (25). During their first archaeological dig, Sarah complains, "You broke up our family for beads?" (25). Much to the chagrin of Penny and Philip, the children remember the imperfections of the past and fail to discern the significance (or symbolism) of the archaeological expedition.

Like a group of miniature Forrest Gumps, the children, see what they see, and no amount of poetry or mythology can change it. Despite the best efforts of Philip and Penny to create a mythological world, reality resolutely appears in the "brutally honest" and articulate observations of their children (Rich, "'Six Degrees Reopens" 155). Retaining the accouterments of society and not wishing to disavow their families, the children take life literally, thus frustrating the plans of their parents (and their mythological model of love and contact). Consequently, the children serve as the play's vehicle for the "collision" between reality and fantasy.

Upon their arrival in Sicily, the children briefly stand center stage and "freeze in place in joy," expressionistically conveying Penny's and Philip's idealistic view of the new family's beginning (7). However, soon after this sequence, the children face off in two groups and create a "cacophony" of confusion by turning on "rival ghetto blasters of rock" (7). Ordering a halt to the noise, Philip and Penny receive the first hint that the children may not be willing participants in Penny's and Philip's intended scenario.

Unable to hide the "petrochemical plants" or mask the fact that the highways in Sicily remind the kids of the "Connecticut turnpike," Philip and Penny have to explain what destroyed their families of origin (16-17). In almost

Greek, choral-like manner, the children ask Penny and Philip pointed questions about the past:

> Is it true you lied to us when you said you went to a college reunion and you really went off with Philip? Is it true you lied to us when you said you went to a college reunion and you really went off with Philip . . . Dad, did you love our mother . . . Mom, did you love Daddy? (25, 33).

Trying to justify themselves before the children and heeding Eros' admonition--"Tell them the love, Don't tell them the lust"--the adults make the mistake of relating the background story of the sculpture entitled "Four Baboons Adoring the Sun" (29). Philip and Penny explain how even though the baboons have been blinded by the power of the sun, "Their eyes running out of their heads with joy . . . Their eyes burnt out because they've seen their God," the animals "don't care" because "they're so happy" (33). Unfortunately, the two children entering puberty, Wayne and Halcy, take the parents at their word. After being discovered in bed together (acting out the example set by Penny and Philip), Wayne and Halcy quote their parents' words to justify their behavior. Wayne exclaims, "Love is the only reality. Love is all" (35).

Indeed, as the children's questions reveal, Philip and Penny discover that they have not even been honest with each other. While the two try to dissuade Wayne and Halcy from their passion, Halcy pointedly asks, "Did you have affairs before each other?" (54). Penny discovers to her horror that Philip had had a two year affair prior to his

own involvement with Penny. Halcy chastises the adults: "I thought you were different. You haven't changed. You're the same in Sicily as you were on Exit Four" (54). Penny can only respond by demanding that Halcy not tell her biological father the truth of what has happened with Wayne. While the adolescents inexorably continue their pursuit of love and immortality, Philip and Penny discover that their own love is tainted.

In Four Baboons Adoring the Sun, it is the parents, not the children, who have duped themselves. They mistakenly believe they can rewrite history and amend the story of their lives. Indeed, until his sojourn to Sicily, Philip had been an archaeologist who had never been in the field (29). It is thus the parents who pretend to create and sustain a pure, mythological love. When Penny momentarily worries about how the journey will affect the prospective unity of the new family, Philip, with some theatricality, explains the idealistic rationale for their adventure:

> We're living in a new universe. You're used to living in Universe A . . . Adults--us-- are over here in Universe A. All facts and reasons and explanations. Every aspect of life dragged down with the same old same old. But over here--please step forward and examine shiny, buoyant Universe B. The kids' universe. Now it's yours. It's where we are . . . No past. Everything free. Mythic . . . All adults try to get back to that world. But you can only do it by falling in love (22).

Like Paul's victims in Six Degrees of Separation, Philip displays a weakness for fantasy borne out of his own needs.

In seeking to deny the reality of the past, Philip and Penny, in effect, use the mountains of Sicily as the hyper-real set for their drama; their children are the parents' captive audience. As theatre critic Henry submits, Philip and Penny suffer from "ordinary people's inability to accept ordinariness" (Rev. of Four Baboons Adoring the Sun 77). Their "epic and mythic" journey, then, represents a volatile mixture of fantasy and the realities of daily life.

Baudrillard would perhaps contend that the family's trip to Sicily becomes a "fatal diversion" (Selected Writings 200). Since Philip and Penny talk endlessly of love's purity, the power of mythology, and the importance of giving in to one's emotions, Wayne and Halcy eventually begin to emulate their parents. Baudrillard has written that vacations are "predestined to boredom," and on this island, there are no diversions, such as movies or pool parties, to distract the family from their escalating drama. Consequently, Philip and Penny must witness how their mythological scenario mutates before their children into a hyper-real experience of love--which ends in Wayne's suicide.

Philip and Penny strive to convince themselves and their children that their marriage represents a perfect new beginning. Penny and Philip exhibit an overwhelming desire to uncover the mythical "secret identities hiding" within;

they wish to share the purity of new love, new beginnings, and happiness with their children (31). Yet like Ouisa in Six Degrees of Separation, both Philip and Penny worry about having to "account" for their actions and fear losing their spontaneity. When the couple arrives at the airport to pick up their respective offspring, Philip and Penny flirt with the idea of making love on the baggage carousel. Acting very much like teenagers themselves, Philip discloses his desire to make love forever. He comments, "We'll spin there for eternity, revolving around and around" (5). Philip and Penny not only want to "annihilate the past" but long to discover a moment of transforming "grace" where the "true self shines through" (31). As theatre reviewer Frank Rich observes, Penny and Philip aspire to prove that the "cynical realities of present-day divorce can co-exist with an innocent faith in primal images" ("Desperate for a Reason to Live" 85). In a less mythical and more simplistic vein, critic Barnes argues that Penny and Philip long to establish one "gorgeously free family" ("Family Gets Lust in Itself" 89). Philip's and Penny's antics, however, often seem rehearsed (and less than immediate). Traveling to the airport, Penny seems disingenuously amazed: "Every traffic light is always green. We find a parking space. And planes arrive on time. Don't tell me that's not a miracle" (5).

However, when Philip and Penny confront a similar romanticism in Wayne and Halcy's professions of love, the parents respond with surprise and confusion. Having observed the children making love, Philip wonders how his dream went awry:

> I saw two inept kids going at it in some insane parody of Penny and me. Universe A? Universe B? Instead of our getting into the kids' world, we had dragged the kids into our world. For all our ideals, we had passed only our fever on to our children. I want life to have passion but I also want life to be sane (60).

Penny takes almost the opposite view and responds emotionally not intellectually. Penny objects, "I saw our children--yes--making love and then in front of my eyes I saw them transformed . . . They are magnificent!" (60-61). The disparity of the parents' views marks the beginning of the end for their mythical dream of renewal and rebirth. In other words, Philip and Penny might have done well, not necessarily to temper the spirit of their love, but to modify their desire for an escape. Philip and Penny let their own drama of love divert them from reality. The two focus on their ecstasy in an extreme fashion and forget that their children watching and learn by their example.

However, once Eros, the mythological character who represents erotic love and the "dark world of chaotic forces," is challenged and the ruins disturbed, the fatal diversion and "irony of catastrophe" is set in motion. Philip and Penny's hyper-pursuit of love metastasizes into

a metaphorical form of cancer that overwhelms the family (Baudrillard, Selected Writings 185-187). Wayne's leap from the cliff represents the "redoubled" effects of his parents' desperate quest for a pure form of love (187). Thus, Wayne and Halcy's passion becomes more real than their parents, more ecstatic, and more deadly. Personifying the power of unbridled desire, Eros sings: "It was easier for baboons to adore the sun than for you to look into the heart, the heart of love" (69). After Wayne's death, the drama dissolves and the family splits. Philip returns to America while Penny stays in Sicily. The couple's dream of a new beginning has been destroyed.

Neither America nor Sicily, however, hold the answer to Wayne's death and the family's separation. Upon his departure, Philip admits, "You belong here. I don't. You actually like making eye contact. No matter what the risks are" (68). Penny discovers that reality ultimately resists manipulation and control, but it must be accepted. Nonetheless, unwilling to give up her dream of new beginnings, Penny chooses to remain in Sicily and live in Eros' mythological world. While Philip's return to America may symbolize his awareness of their dream's impossibility, he fails to grasp the bond of human emotions shared between himself and his family. Guare seems to argue that, in order to live fully in the moment, one must disavow the

desires of fantasies and accept life's dualities (of darkness and light, joy and suffering).

Philip and Penny set a dangerous example for their offspring. They fail to teach their impressionable children how to distinguish between fantasy and reality, that mythological stories can inform their lives in a poetic, but not literal, sense. For instance, when Halcy, after having read stories in Penny's book of mythology, wants to know why "people turn into trees," Penny flatly responds: "Let's get in the car" (15). When the parents refuse to allow Wayne and Halcy to consummate their young love, old resentments and bitterness re-emerge and reveal the futility of the parents' high-flown idealism. Nonetheless, Wayne and Halcy, the thirteen year old siblings, slip away on their own, determined to experience the joys of physical and spiritual love. Like Icarus, Wayne assumes that the euphoria of love makes him immortal. Eros, however, teaches the newly-formed family a grim lesson, as Wayne takes his romantic, lamentable leap to death.

In Four Baboons Adoring the Sun, Guare combines "domestic comedy, Sicilian geography, mythical symbolism, and classic allusions" to highlight the affectation of Penny and Philip's dream (Henry, Rev. of Four Baboons Adoring the Sun 77). In typical fashion, the critics seemed to confuse Guare's characters and their antics with

the person of the playwright. Parents who plant archaeological artifacts in the manner of a "Bronze Age Easter egg hunt" obviously have lost track of common sense. In fact, this exercise verges on the hilarious. The children in the play, of course, see through the ruse, but many critics glibly condemned the play as a "ponderously staged pedantic pageant" (Henry, Rev. of Four Baboons Adoring the Sun 77). Theatre scholar Wilson wondered why a talented playwright like Guare should "fall into the trap" of using a "mythical apparatus" usually reserved for inexperienced writers ("New Play by John Guare" 84). Wilson misses the point that the mythical apparatus of the drama mirrors, in an expressionistic sense, the delusions of Philip and Penny. It is as though Guare concocted a fictional Sicily seen through the star-crossed eyes of a middle-aged Romeo and Juliet.

Six Degrees of Separation and Four Baboons Adoring the Sun argue that, while Americans may long for an "inner directed" family contact, Americans also seem willing participants in the death of imagination and the triumph of simulacra. Quick film cuts, magical time shifts, special effects, brevity, poetry, music, and direct address highlight the myriad ways fictive models dominate modern life in the nineties (Hall, Preface to Four Baboons Adoring the Sun ix). Both plays mirror the short attention spans

of modern TV trained audiences.[88] Both works last less than ninety minutes and have no intermission. Even before rehearsals began for Six Degrees of Separation, Guare determined that "speed" should play an integral role in the performance of the play. In his production notes, Guare writes, "All I knew about the play was that it had to go like the wind" (Six Degrees of Separation 8). Guare may be trying to keep an impatient audience's attention, but, by having actors sit in the audience and step in and out of gilt picture frames, Guare also seems to be endeavoring to foreground the artifice of the theatre, to awaken the viewers' sense of themselves as individuals separate from the entertainment product, a task that grows ever more formidable in contemporary culture.

Actors planted in the audience represent nothing new in theatrical tradition. Guare, however, insists on revealing his technique in obvious ways that resist being ignored or missed. Guare wants the audience to know they are attending a play and that the modern media, i.e. cinema and television, despite a slickness of style and technological advances, operate in much the same manner as live theatre.

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[88]Some critics, like Thomas Disch and Gerald Weales, accuse Guare of "pandering" to the superficiality of polite society (Disch, Rev. of Six Degrees of Separation; Weales, "Degrees of Difference").

The film version of Six Degrees of Separation, which endeavored to maintain a balance between Guare's highly theatrical approach and film's inclination toward realism, nonetheless, argues the point in paradoxical fashion. The dialogue remained unchanged for the most part from the stage version. Yet Guare seemed "miffed" about the way film might alter his intent (Qtd. in Story 38-39). Guare's presence on the set, however, kept the theatrical spirit of the play in tact. In the play, Ouisa and Flan tell the story in flashbacks by directly addressing the audience. In the film, director Fred Schepisi, perhaps at Guare's insistence, had Ouisa and Flan growing ever more popular with larger and larger audiences of friends, dinner guests, and business associates; the couple would before them tell the glamorous story of Paul, the mysterious yet elegant impostor. Cleverly, Schepisi stressed the manner in which experience becomes "anecdote" and how Ouisa and Flan exploited the story to gain fame for themselves.

Will Smith, the television star who played Paul in the movie version of Six Degrees of Separation, curiously, balked at kissing another man in the film because his audience would not know the kiss was a staged, fictional occurrence. Smith complained

> Because TV audiences let me into their houses every Monday night at 8 P. M., they think they know me. I'm not an actor to them. This wouldn't be Will Smith playing a homosexual. In the 'hood,' believe me, I am who I play (Qtd. in Story 43).

Smith's fear corroborates Guare's vision of a society that has become less and less able or willing to ascertain the difference between fantasy and reality.[89] The fact that Guare based Six Degrees of Separation on a real story of celebrity chicanery only serves to underscore the modern elision of reality and fantasy and give credibility to Smith's reservations.

Six Degrees of Separation and Four Baboons Adoring the Sun represent a combination of concerns about fulfillment in modern America. The plays express the desire for family contact idealized in the fifties through the elaborate fantasies fostered by both the Kittredges and the McKenzies. Both works portray the lingering malaise and the break-up of families from the seventies through the alienation of the children (Paul and Wayne in particular). Set in high culture venues (art and archaeology), both confront the elitism and materialism of the eighties. In sum, however, the Kittredges abandon their own children for the "anecdotal" elixir of Paul's elaborate fantasies, while Philip and Penny destroy themselves in the web of their own

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[89]Author Richard Story seemed to be enthralled with the glamour of movie-making. Story makes a point to relate how Smith's khakis were from J. Crew, that the blue blazer came from Brooks Brothers, and that the pink shirt was a "custom-made Ike Behar button-down," as if the brand names of the costumes enhanced the status of the film. If anything, Story's need to divulge such trivia casts him in the role of one of Guare's "star fuckers" (Story 43).

deceit. According to the plays, confusion in America grows stronger and more virulent with each passing decade.

Despite the media's mixing of fantasy and desire into an alluring new "hyperreality," Americans in the nineties still seek to check the media's influence on the home. At this point however, approaches to successful family life seem unable to find pattern and expression in anything except media models. This phenomenon recently appeared in a much publicized occasion when Newt Gingrich, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, argued that many family problems could be solved by emulating movies like Boy's Town. With such outlandish suggestions, the desire for contact in current times leads one to confront a lack of viable options. Nonetheless, the attractiveness of the interpersonal contact and intimacy emulated in such films cannot be denied.

Consequently, Guare's desire to have people account for the experience in their lives, a theme that runs throughout most of Guare's work, becomes all the more problematic in the "hyperreal" nineties. Because Guare's characters in Six Degrees of Separation and Four Baboons Adoring the Sun live in a world of idealized simulacra, the heightened desire of Guare's families to make contact, find each other, and re-define the meaning and purpose in their lives results in an enhanced susceptibility to seduction. For Guare's families of the nineties, the "nullity" of

violence (the deaths of Wayne in Four Baboons Adoring the Sun and Rick, and perhaps Paul, in Six Degrees of Separation) bursts into their lives to destroy the fantasies on which they have come to depend (Kellner 198). Guare argues that even though the power of the media often frustrates human perception, reality (i.e. the facts of our daily lives) eventually will assert itself, often in death and destruction, to re-awaken the human spirit. As theatre scholar Brustein surmises, Guare takes ordinary people and plops them into bizarre (and dangerous) situations that push them toward a "crisis of self-realization" (Rev. of Four Baboons Adoring the Sun 32). Unfortunately for Guare's characters, the only discernible "realization" seems to be the pain and suffering that accompanies their heartbreak.

EPILOGUE: ACHIEVING BALANCE

The American way of life has always represented the chance for individuals to be free, rich, and to chart the course of their own destiny. Such freedom, however, has also generated collateral pressure on the individual to succeed in a grand manner. The views of foreign observer Alexis de Tocqueville, though written in 1835, accurately express the anxiety still associated with today's American identity:

> This magnificent image of themselves does not meet the gaze of Americans at intervals only; it may be said to haunt every one of them in his least as well as his most important actions and to be always flitting before his mind (Qtd. in the frontispiece to Gunfighter Nation).

In short, it seems that Americans are continually "haunted" by the "magnificence" of their heritage and its emphasis on individual achievement.

When one looks deeper, a more complete assessment of the American identity divulges a deep-seated longing for emotional intimacy (unrepresented in the Puritan work ethic). Indeed, in the decade of the seventies, a period of national decline (when the American dream seemed in danger of dissolution), 96% of all Americans "admitted a commitment to the ideal of two people spending their lives together" (Carroll, It Seemed Like Nothing Happened 282). Social commentator Paul Wachtel argues that individual pursuits (part and parcel of the American identity)

necessarily conflict with the inmost issues of family and community:

> Rather than experiencing ourselves in a natural, unself-conscious way, we are continuously, obsessively, and centrally aware of our 'selves' almost as separate entities that we observe, evaluate, and try to improve . . . Critics note that our self-obsessed populace seem to crave and strive for intimacy to an unprecedented degree. Our concern with achieving emotional immediacy, with assaying and refining the quality of our interpersonal relations, places an enormous burden on the institution of marriage and family (197).

It seems that the guiding tenets of American fulfillment may, in fact, resist the desires of the human heart. When manipulated and given exaggerated expression in the media, the American dream is further transformed; no key to happiness, the dream becomes a mirage, an unsuitable model for attaining contentment. Over the course of his career, Guare has observed and written about this dilemma, one in which the American dream, persistently glamorized in the media, has become more elusive and less connected to the realities of daily life. Reflecting America's frustration, Guare's body of work suggests that the idealized American dream (as presented in the media) has failed to deliver what Americans actually want--intimacy, honesty, and emotional contact (in family, interpersonal relationships, and community).

Despite the author's best efforts, Americans in the nineties have no better skill at making contact with one another or accepting limits than people did forty years

ago. Given the incidence of urban violence, many Americans hide indoors and turn to Oprah Winfrey for emotional comfort. Indeed, it seems that Winfrey and an ever growing cadre of talk show hosts can do the laughing, crying, and relating for many silent Americans. Retail malls replete with trees, movie theatres, salons, fountains, restaurants, and security police have replaced the city parks and neighborhood streets as community gathering places. TV news polls tell Americans how to vote ahead of time and proclaim election results with only a fraction of the votes counted. Indeed, reporters seem to have become more important than the stories (and human beings) they cover. According to Guare, the search for fulfillment that engages all Americans should include an assessment of the mass media and its influence on the American way of life.

As Guare's plays contend, Americans have demonstrated a firm reluctance to let go of the images and ideas produced in TV and film. While it is probably true that fantasy helps allay pressure and fear, the nation seems unable to achieve any sort of healthy balance between extravagant dreams and the limitations of daily life. As Americans become more and more dependent on the media for guidance, information, and emotional release, the confusion between fantasy and the realities of daily life multiplies.

Actors on talk-shows boast of doing their own stunts in films, while out of the nation's heartland, two youths

took Oliver Stone literally and set out on a cross-country killing bonanza, emulating the movie, Natural Born Killers. Indeed, after enduring the most amazing media blitz in the history of American jurisprudence, even O.J. Simpson may not be able to ascertain his own guilt or innocence. Film critics, Gene Siskel and Roger Ebert, appear on TV, tell us which movies to see, and become celebrities in their own right. Meanwhile, computer technology (and virtual reality devices) allows people to experience roller coaster rides and parachute-jumping without having to brave the outdoors.

In today's America, there are plenty of gadgets to help occupy and pass the time. Nonetheless, many Americans believe that fulfillment only comes through NBA stardom or winning the lottery. Too commonly, real success is measured against the likes of Michael Jordan or Luciano Pavarotti. As Lasch wrote in the seventies, the advent of media dominance in American society means that success also "has to be ratified by publicity" (The Culture of Narcissism Qtd. in Wilkinson, 252). Yet even the likes of Jordan and Pavarotti find fame and its hunger insatiable. For example, having thoroughly conquered basketball, Jordan felt compelled to try baseball. When riding his own luxury bus to minor league games proved unsatisfactory, Jordan made a spectacular return to the NBA and picked up exactly where he left off. Pavarotti, on the other hand, enlisted Placido Domingo and Jose Carreras as back-up singers in the

world renowned "Three Tenors" concert. After the unparalleled success of their European concert, Pavarotti and company decided to produce an American sequel in Dodger stadium (Parade 8).[90]

Guare's understanding of the bizarre dynamics of modern society often seems prophetic. By the time of the 1986 revival of The House of Blue Leaves, for instance, the Pope actually had been the victim of an assassination attempt. Critic Leslie Bennetts reports that although the idea of blowing up the Pope in 1971 seemed "ludicrous," in 1986 many people accused Guare of rewriting the script to incorporate recent events (C19). What was farcical in 1971 became realistic in 1986. In 1986, Guare noted:

> The first time around, people would say to me, 'Blowing up the Pope is the wackiest idea!' I think the violence of the play seems closer to home now. It's as if the audience back then could witness the play through a framed mirror and say, 'Look at that other world.' Somehow the shooting of the Pope shattered that glass, and the audience is now sitting on the same side of the mirror (Qtd. in Bennetts C19).

Indeed, in what may be the supreme irony of Guare's career, con-man David Hampton's harassment of Guare may make the most eloquent defense of the playwright's assessment of contemporary American culture. In keeping with his proclivity for using real events in his plays, Guare "loosely" based Six Degrees of Separation on the 1983

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[90]A trio version of the aria "Nessun Dorma" (from Turandot) may not be what composer Giacomo Puccini had in mind, but it certainly qualifies as "hyper-real" excess.

story of Hampton's "guying" of two of Guare's friends (Friend 327). Riding the wave of Six Degrees of Separation's success proved to be a difficult task for Guare. Indeed, Guare would pay something of a heavy price for elevating the real story of Hampton to the level of New York commercial theatre.

Having harassed and duped the likes of actor Gary Sinise, conductor Leonard Bernstein, and Valerie Jennings, former wife of ABC's Peter Jennings, since arriving in New York in 1981, Hampton spent almost two years in prison for perpetrating numerous frauds (Kasindorf 40). Exhibiting no remorse whatsoever, however, Hampton seized upon the success of Six Degrees of Separation and tried to "parlay" Guare's success into the career opportunity Hampton had been needing and demanding (41). Hampton went on to threaten Guare with violence and lawsuits; he called Guare on the phone, crashed cast parties, and conducted public attacks of Guare and his friends for misrepresenting the truth (Friend 404, Kasindorf 43).

Ignoring the premise of poetic license, however, Hampton complained: "There was none of this scene about somebody running around the house naked with their male organs dangling within public eyesight. It's totally far-fetched" (Qtd. in Kasindorf 44). Yet in a deluded fashion that Guare seems to explore in Six Degrees of Separation, Hampton continues to believe that he and Paul

are one and the same person. Hampton has gone so far as to describe himself as the lead in the play; he wears the khakis, blazer, and pink shirt made famous by the movie (40). Yet Hampton reveals some of the darker motives behind his own media blitz (and his own hypocrisy) when he protests:

> You don't take someone's life story without contacting them. You don't do that. You don't steal from one's life . . . If I upset him and make him [Guare] nervous, then why did he spend his time writing about me? I obviously have not upset his bank account in the last year, have I? (45).

Thus, after numerous unpleasant encounters, Guare now refuses to talk to or about Hampton (45). Perhaps if Guare had known Hampton's criminal history and menacing personality, he might have made his references to factual events in Six Degrees of Separation less direct. Nonetheless, Guare's fear of Hampton seems to be healthy and justifiable. Reporter Friend recounts that Guare's friends see Hampton's "naked effort to piggyback on Guare's celebrity and power" as "terrifying" (404). Thanks to Hampton, Guare has now gained first-hand experience of collapsed boundaries, that is, the dangerous blurring of fantasy and reality.

Yet despite Hampton's mental imbalance, he may have a point to make regarding his claim that Guare capitalized on his crimes.[91] Indeed, Guare may have been the one to

[91]More sinister forms of exploitation can be seen in the numerous books appearing about the O.J. Simpson murder

"piggyback" on Hampton's notoriety. The playwright did take Hampton's story and turn it into something of a small fortune. Guare also included many of the unusual details of his friends' encounters with Hampton in the play. For instance, Hampton did have an address book of famous people that he used to initiate his con-games, and the Elliots did find Hampton in bed with a man after spending the night in their apartment.

Describing his experience writing Six Degrees of Separation, Guare remarks, "I heard about an event in 1983. Read about it in the papers. Forgot the event" until six years later (Six Degrees of Separation 6). Guare's comment fails to mention the fact that his personal friends were the ones who were conned. Guare, in a somewhat lofty philosophical manner, also notes the undeniable force of inspiration that urged him forward. Guare mused:

> Because you cannot say to that knocking: Later. Or not right now. It's perverse, that unconscious. It only shows up at the most inappropriate time, when it's not been asked for (Production Notes in Six Degrees of Separation 6).

Guare's account of the writing experience smacks of divine intervention and exceeds the facts. In face of such noble sentiments (and certain omissions of fact), Hampton's jealousy, if not his criminal activity, may seem more understandable. Given the emotional power of Six Degrees

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case and in prison-art made and sold by serial killers.

of Separation, Guare's high-minded explanation seems gratuitous and unnecessary.

Furthermore, Guare balks when interviews get too personal, and he diligently guards his own private life. It is curious (and perhaps hypocritical) that Guare refuses to read things written about him, because, in his estimation, "it fictionalizes" him (Chatfield-Taylor Qtd. in Friend 327). Indeed, Guare's wife describes Guare as "very, very private;" she asserts that "very few people really know him" (Chatfield-Taylor, Qtd. in Friend 327). Yet Guare has never shied away from using any number of real events as fodder for his artistic cannon. It could be argued that Guare's *modus operandi* as a playwright follows something of a double standard, one that diminishes his artistic credibility. Guare's insights into modern media confusion would be even more prescient, perhaps, had he descended from his artistic pedestal and found some way to acknowledge Hampton's complaint.

Hampton may have been the surprise Guare could have done without, but Hampton's harassment may be the price Guare has to pay for the commercial success of Six Degrees of Separation. Having spent his career writing about a society that gets too wrapped up in dreams (of fame and fortune) that confound the boundaries between fantasy and reality, Guare's personal ordeals with Hampton only serve to corroborate the playwright's contentions. It remains to

be seen, however, if Guare can transform Hampton's harassment into more autobiographical material for the stage by "fashioning these insults and affronts into [more] arrestingly funny and terrifying fictions" (Friend 329). Where Hampton is concerned, however, Guare seems to have lost his desire for melding the reality of his life with the business of playwriting.

With similar reluctance and confusion, America is feeling the effects of fifty years of media influence in the home. However, as the entire canon of Guare's plays assert, simple contact with the realities of daily life may be the first step in rekindling intimacy and a sense of community. Guare's plays urge us to take another look at our history and step back from the technology of the television and the computer screen; we must look at each other face to face and accept the banal, yet no less profound, limits in our lives. The secret to meaningful living and fulfillment lies not in the materialism fostered by media but in community and the mutual acceptance of human frailties, desires, and differences.

Guare was one of the first American playwrights to criticize post-World War II American culture and its dependence on television and the mass media. Numerous examples from the plays demonstrate how the consequences of the "massaging" media are often tragic. In The House of Blue Leaves, once he realizes his life's limits and the

destruction of his dreams, Artie responds by killing Bananas, the mirror to his failure. On the other hand, Marco Polo Sings a Solo delineates the equally destructive impact of being bound by no limits whatsoever. Like untethered astronauts, the characters in the futuristic Marco Polo Sings a Solo "drift aimlessly from room to room" hopelessly disconnected from the mother ship, unable to touch anyone else or grab hold of their dreams (Dasgupta 49). Urged on by grandiose fantasies, Wayne and Tybalt leap to their ignominious deaths in what they believe will be glorious immortality. In Landscape of the Body, Rosalie suffers an ignominious death at the hands of a less than contrite cyclist whose declaration discloses a pervasive selfishness (and lack of community) in society: "I don't give a shit if she's dead! Who's gonna fix my bike?" (22).

Nonetheless, many of Guare's characters begin to recognize the media's power to influence their lives. By the end of Landscape of the Body, for example, Betty has begun to understand the complicated ways she had embraced unattainable ideals. Betty states:

> I feel like I'm standing in that corner over there watching me, and if I try hard enough I can switch the dial and I'll see me on another channel. I'd like a laugh track around my life. I'd like a funny theme introducing my life. I'm standing right over there in that corner watching me (10).

Later, after Holahan invokes numerous movie references, Betty mocks Holahan's escapism: "You got movies on the brain. It must make life easy for you. You can just put

anything you want into a movie and that explains everything" (15). Betty has learned that the experiences presented in movies bear little relation to the depth and pain of her real life.

For Betty, and all America, the way back may lie in the willingness to make contact with the person "across the dinner table" and in coming to the simple, yet profound, revelation that what is--is. Guare's plays illustrate that the media and the American dream have become intertwined components of modern society. While it may be impossible to extricate one part from the other, an awareness of the mix's potential combustibility could keep Americans grounded in physical reality and in touch with one another. Guare urges society to make contact and live in the present. Confronting the increasing occurrence of media intrusions into private life, Guare portrays the stories of individual Americans who seek to strike a balance in life between public and private concerns and also come to some understanding of their own identities.

Britain's Sir Peter Hall, who directed the premiere of Four Baboons Adoring the Sun, characterizes Guare's "post-naturalistic" approach to playwriting as one that hinges on the "sensibility of an age conditioned by the jump cuts and dissolves of the cinema" (Preface to Four Baboons Adoring the Sun ix). Throughout his career, Guare has endured harsh criticisms which center on a lack of

consistency, order, structure, and realistic narrative. Only critic Michael Feingold seems to suggest that a majority of theatre critics lack a sense of humor and are unwilling to unlatch themselves from pre-conceived notions of good playwriting. In a mock interview with Ibsen, Feingold has Ibsen defending Guare's zaniness and wild abandon. Ibsen declares:

> So there is a kind of person that doesn't like his plays very much, the kind that likes everything to happen in a nice, orderly way . . . But why should plays be efficient and neat? The world isn't like that ("Freeze-Dried Despair" 43).

According to Feingold, people take Ibsen and Chekhov too seriously, too. Feingold defends the modern playwright by asserting that, in a surprising and chaotic world, Guare reminds people that the one thing they can always do is laugh ("Freeze-Dried Despair" 43). The critics' disapproval notwithstanding, Guare's plays (and their myriad stylistic techniques) honestly reflect, decade by decade, the bewildering evolution of the American identity since the 1960s.

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Title of Dissertation: John Guare: In Search of America

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EXAMINING COMMITTEE:

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